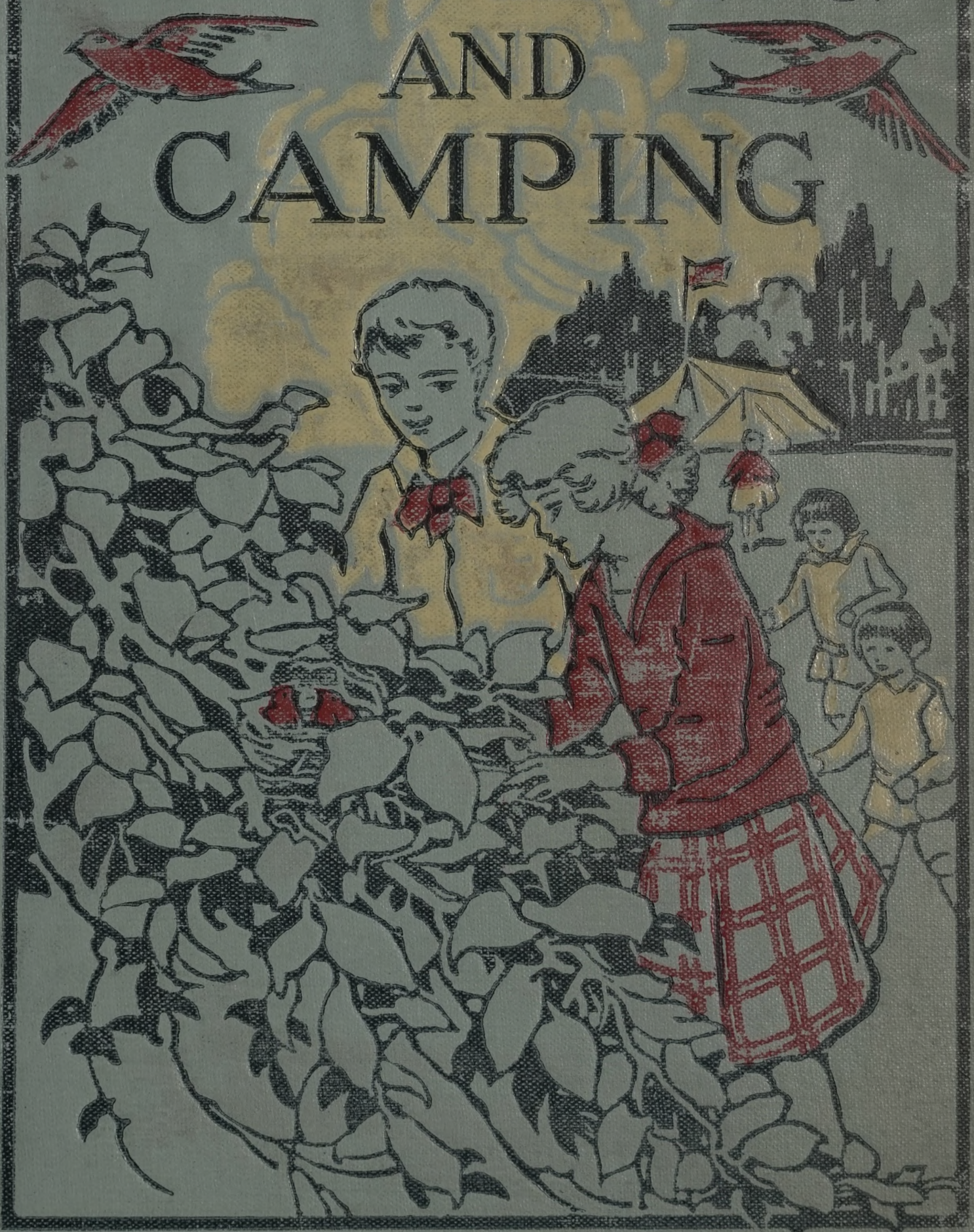
LITTLE FOLKS TRAMPING AND CAMPING



ANNA BLUNT MORGAN



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A BRIGHT-EYED OVEN-BIRD MOTHER SAT AT THE DOOR OF HER LITTLE HOME. — *Page 155.*

LITTLE FOLKS TRAMPING AND CAMPING

A Nature-Study Story
of
Real Children and a Real Camp

By
ANNA BLUNT MORGAN

ILLUSTRATED BY HAROLD JAMES CUE



BOSTON
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Little Folks Tramping and Camping



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TO

SHERBURNE MORGAN

AND TO

THE NIECES AND NEPHEWS OF
"AUNTY"

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Children Meet Madam Nuthatch	13
II.	Introducing Marshall	25
III.	Opening Day at the Restaurant	34
IV.	The Children Make the Acquaintance of Jim Crow	48
V.	A February Walk	64
VI.	A Snowstorm and Visitors	74
VII.	Housekeeping	85
VIII.	The Children Entertain a Stranger	94
IX.	A Happy Day	111
X.	Fire!	128
XI.	Uncle to the Rescue	141
XII.	The Wrens' Introduction to the World	159
XIII.	Marshall Entertains	170
XIV.	A Storm and a Secret	186
XV.	Camp Life	203
XVI.	A Visit to the Lake	220
XVII.	Sherburne's Pet	236
XVIII.	Anne	249
XIX.	Lessons	260
XX.	Lost-a Picnic	277
XXI.	Humming-Birds' Home-Life	295
XXII.	Night in the Forest	312
XXIII.	A Forest Fire	331
XXIV.	Prizes	350

ILLUSTRATIONS

A bright-eyed oven-bird mother sat at the door of her little home (Page 155) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Just as I thought. Grosbeaks, and crossbills, and redpolls" 78

He flung it directly over the creature's head 102

Rambling along under the trees, with his hat in his hand, he recited a poem 154

He lifted the door of the cage 246

She did not offer to fly when he put his hand upon her 348

PART I

LITTLE FOLKS TRAMPING

LITTLE FOLKS TRAMPING AND CAMPING

CHAPTER I

THE CHILDREN MEET MADAM NUTHATCH

"Shrewd little haunter of woods all gray,
Whom I meet on my walk of a winter day,
You're busy inspecting each cranny and hole
In the ragged bark of yon hickory bole;
You intent on your task and I on the law
Of your wonderful head and gymnastic claw.

* * * * *

Head upward, head downward, all one to you,
Zenith and nadir the same to your view."

EDITH THOMAS.

THE firelight glowed warmly upon five rosy faces gathered about the great old-fashioned fireplace, and strove to light the shadowy corners fast darkening in the early February twilight. Such a jolly room it is. Big easy-chairs are there; big windows to let in the sun; a soft, thick rug, well-worn by childish

feet; a big table, its top well scratched by childish fingers, its legs scarred by children's boots; a big bearskin before the fire, to lie upon and dream, as one gazes into the glowing coals; and, best of all, a big, broad couch at one side, so good for—oh, so many things! A word, and it is transformed into a fort in time of siege, a desert island, a boat, a train; but ready, at a moment's notice, to be a couch again, welcoming some little sufferer with a wee bit of a cold, or a little body tired with play; or, better still, a place for mother to rest, while one snuggles up by her side and pours interesting confidences into her sympathetic ear.

No wonder, then, that Uncle, mounting the steps in two great strides, was surprised, when he entered the room, to find tears and woeful faces there. In the very biggest big arm-chair sat Elizabeth, vainly striving to comfort her little sister, a damp little bundle of misery curled up beside her, half in and half out of her lap. In front of them stood the three boys, curious and sympathetic, and a wee bit envious of the importance of Caroline. For this was no ordinary trouble, such as a bump or a cut finger.

"Well, well! What's all this about?" cried

Uncle, bending over the unhappy little figure in Elizabeth's arms. His sympathetic tones brought a fresh burst of tears.

"Here! Here! This won't do," he cried. "What can be the matter to cause such a deluge?"

"She's hurt," explained Elizabeth, feeling quite grown-up. "And I don't want her to bother Mamma, because she's with Marshall."

"A very good reason," answered Uncle, kindly patting the tumbled hair, and brushing it back out of Caroline's swollen eyes. "Let Elizabeth be Mamma this time, Caroline, and I'll be the doctor," he suggested, smiling cheerfully at her. "How are you hurt?"

"Something *bit her!*" cried Rob, eager to tell the exciting news, while Caroline poured forth more tears.

"What bit her? A mosquito?" laughed Uncle, though secretly now a little anxious.

"We don't know," answered Elizabeth, cuddling the child closer in her arms.

"How can that be?" asked Uncle, wondering. "Where were you?"

" 'Twas in a hole in a tree," Elizabeth began to explain.

"'Twas a *snake!*" wailed Caroline, between her sobs. "It hissed *awful!*"

"Oh, no; this is too early for snakes," said Uncle kindly. "They have not waked up from their winter's sleep yet." And he took the little weeping figure into his arms. "Let me see," he said. "Where is the bite?" And Caroline eagerly held up a red and swollen thumb. "Come, tell me all about it," he said in a comforting tone, settling her cozily in his arms, her head against his shoulder.

"I went out in the back-yard to play with the boys," she began.

"An' we found a hole," interrupted Sherburne.

"In a tree," shouted James.

"Yes," agreed Caroline. "And it was just fine to play post-ovice in. And I was pos'man, an' the boys wrote letters an' put 'em in the hole. An' the wind blewed 'em way down in, an' when I put my hand in," she paused—a fresh burst of tears drowning her words, as she recalled the thrilling moment. "An' I put my hand 'way down in the hole," she continued, controlling her sobs," an' something *awful* grabbed my finger an' bit an' punched, an' punched my

hand with something *sharp!*'' The last words ended in a wail that was calculated to bring Mamma from any part of the house, had not Uncle smothered it against his broad chest in a comforting bear-hug.

''There, there!'' he crooned, as he rocked her back and forth like a baby. ''You are more frightened than hurt. Are you sure that you didn't get into a woodpecker's hole?''

Caroline looked at him blankly, but Rob answered: ''No, Uncle. I've never seen a 'red-head' about this place,—only out on the telegraph poles.''

''It might have been some other kind of woodpecker,'' suggested Uncle.

''I didn't know there was but one kind,'' said Rob, his eyes opening wide with a new interest.

''Let's go see,'' cried Elizabeth, jumping to her feet. So, with Caroline on Uncle's back, they all tramped out through the back hall and kitchen, into the back-yard, the twin cousins, James and Sherburne, leading them straight to the tree with a hole in it.

''I think I can guess who the guilty party was,'' laughed Uncle, as he gently kicked the base of the tree. Almost instantly Madam Nut-

hatch appeared at her front door, gave a startled look about her, and then with a harsh "Hank! Hank!" flew swiftly away. With her black cap standing very much on end, her pretty gray gown much rumpled and tossed, she looked a very cross and disorderly housekeeper aroused from a nap. With tear-dimmed eyes Caroline watched her small antagonist disappear, and when she finally understood that it was this small bird who had so completely routed her, she was much disgusted, and quite ready to dry her eyes and return to her play.

"What kind of a bird was it, Uncle?" Elizabeth asked, as they returned the house.

"A nuthatch," answered Uncle. "It is one of the few birds that can stand our long, cold winters. You should encourage her to stay by feeding her, for she is a very useful bird, eating the insects that would injure these beautiful trees that your father is so proud of."

As he spoke they entered the big living-room which they had left a few moments before. A shower of sparks flew madly up the chimney as they opened the door, quite as if they had been in mischief while the family was out of the

room, and the clouded faces and tearful eyes disappeared as if by magic.

"What have you been doing all day?" asked Uncle, as they seated themselves once more about the fireplace. "Have you been out of doors?"

"Only the little kids," answered Elizabeth, her face clouding over again.

"What could we do out-of-doors in February? It's too cold to go wild-flowering, and too warm to skate or slide! February is a horrid month, except for holidays on great men's birthdays."

"Why not go bird-hunting, as I have been doing?" answered Uncle, smiling but sympathetic.

"I don't want to hunt birds!" cried Caroline, her recent experience with the nuthatch still fresh in her mind.

Uncle laughed, and Elizabeth exclaimed; "Bird-hunting! Why, Uncle Hal, I didn't think that you would hunt birds!"

"I don't see that you have brought any," grumbled disappointed Rob, nosing about for the "bag," visions of plover for tea fast disappearing.

"I hunt with my eyes," laughed Uncle; "but I did bring one home."

"But," interrupted Elizabeth, who was at that trying age when extreme youth, in the pride of much newly acquired wisdom, is continually trying to set mature folks right, "the birds have not come back from the south yet."

"Birdies didn't all go away," piped up the little cousin from the south.

"You're right," said Uncle, swinging the four-year-old up to his unoccupied knee. "Some did stay at home, little Mrs. Nuthatch for instance; some are paying us winter visits; and a very few have returned from the south. At any rate, I saw a bluebird to-day."

"What! Really! Oh, Uncle, how lovely!" came from a chorus of voices.

"What do you really mean, Uncle, by saying that you have been hunting the birds?" persisted Elizabeth.

"Ever since I was a boy," explained Uncle, who, with his handsome face and merry ways, seemed little more than that now, "I have followed the birds through mud and mire, studying their looks and habits. Whenever I am in a new neighborhood I take long tramps about

the country, hunting for new bird-friends and renewing acquaintance with old ones. This bird-study is one of my keenest pleasures.

"Nature spreads wide her book,
In a temple fair and free,—
To all who may listen, she cries, 'Come look!
Come and learn at my knee.
Watch the change of the finch's vest,
Note how the high-hole carves his nest;
Come with a light foot and loving breast,
And bring your ills with you.'"

"But, Uncle," said Elizabeth, when he had finished his little quotation, "we don't have any bright, pretty birds away up here in this cold climate."

"What!" cried Uncle, indignant at such ignorance of his native birds.

Before he could finish his sentence she hastily added, "I mean, of course, except our orioles, and bluebirds, and,—and,—oh, one or two others," she finished, flushing and stammering in her confusion.

"Such as the scarlet tanager, the indigo-bird, the yellow warbler, the goldfinch, the red-headed woodpecker, the flicker," rattled the doctor, so rapidly that he had to pause for breath.

"I didn't think of those," began Elizabeth, blushing deeply.

"No," said Uncle gravely, setting the twin cousins upon the floor, and beginning to pace up and down before the fire, a trick of his when deeply in earnest. "No, you didn't think! The boy who sends the pebble flying from his sling-shot into the breast of some happy little songster, stilling forever its heart full of melody, 'never thought' how this little creature was doing his part to brighten a world, with beauty and music. Nor did he think, to look at it from the business man's standpoint, of the value each little bird is to the world, by killing innumerable injurious insects and worms. Neither does the young girl 'think,' as she tosses her pretty head, adorned with the once quivering breast of the gull, how the gentle creature agonized that she might be decked out.—But here! here! What have I done," he cried, astonished that his little outburst had brought such shame and horror into the childish eyes turned on him. "I'm sure you never did those dreadful things, and this summer I am going to teach you to know and love your native birds so well that you can never take pleasure in see-

ing or wearing their little dead bodies." Then, seating himself again, with the twins in their usual places, he said, "How many kinds of birds do you little folks suppose there are in Wisconsin? I mean both of those that live here and those that just pass through on their long journeys in spring and fall."

Elizabeth thought for a moment, and then answered timidly, "Fifty, perhaps."

"How many, Rob?" said Uncle, turning to his nephew.

"Well," said Rob, who had been trying to do a little lightning calculating while Elizabeth was answering, "there must be four or five kinds of sparrows; and of warblers—I think that's what you call the song-birds—there must be a dozen kinds. Then you said there's more than one kind of woodpecker,"—

"Oh," cried Uncle, interrupting him with a good-natured laugh, "you poor, ignorant city children! I think it's time I came to teach you to see the things before your eyes. Now let me make a suggestion. I shall be here all summer,"—

Here shouts of applause drowned his voice for a moment. "And," he continued, when he

could be heard, "you and I will have long glorious tramps through the woods and meadows, to the lakes and marshes. And you shall learn to know and love your little bird-brothers. Then when I go away in the autumn, I shall repeat my question, 'How many kinds of birds may be seen in this State?' And of course you older ones understand that, with the exception of a very few, the same birds may be found anywhere in this latitude, east of the Rocky Mountains and the plains. And the one of you who gives me the best answer shall receive a prize." Amidst the shouts and applause with which his words were received, Mamma entered the room. "But, Rob," he continued, when they were quiet once more, "let me tell you now that song-birds are not all warblers, and warblers are often poor singers."

"Oh, Hal! Hal!" cried Mamma, when the children had made her acquainted with his plans. "In this weather! I see visions of wet feet—pneumonia! Well," with a shake of her head, "you're the doctor. You will have to see them safely through it. But come, now. Marshall is waiting." And they all tramped gayly up the stairs to their brother's room.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING MARSHALL

"If thou art pained with the world's noisy stir,
Or crazed with its mad tumults, and weighed down
With any of the ills of human life;
If thou art sick and weak—

* * * * *

Then turn into the peaceful woods and hear
The thrilling music of the forest-birds."

ISAAC MCCLELLAN.

MARSHALL, a pale, slender lad, not yet sixteen, lay in his room on a couch near the fire, as he had done for many months,—months in which he had seen his boyhood companions grow broad and tall, strong and eager, rapidly entering the full bloom and beauty of manhood, while he alone, of all the boys in his class, lay bound by the cruel master, ill-health. Many doctors had tried their skill upon him, but in vain.

A few days before our story opens his father's brother, or Uncle Hal, as we shall know him, had arrived from abroad, full of enthusiasm about the, then, new theory of sunshine and

fresh air as the weapons to be used upon the disease which he feared had fastened itself upon his nephew. At first Marshall rather dreaded his uncle's coming, as an invalid nearly always does dread any change. But to know Uncle was to love him, and within a few days Marshall had given him his whole heart and confidence.

The boy smiled as he heard the children tramping up the stairs. "They're going to tell me something to-night, Aunty," he said, turning to Sherburne's mother, who sat near him. "I can tell by the way they come up the stairs. They are in such a hurry that they haven't time to scrap on the way."

As he ceased speaking and turned toward the door with his usual winning smile, the little party entered, Uncle bearing a twin on each shoulder.

For five minutes the children all talked at once, trying to explain to their brother their uncle's plan. Marshall listened almost as eagerly as if he, too, were to have a part of the fun. But Uncle thought he saw a wistful look in the boy's eyes as he turned them toward the fast-darkening landscape without, and he hastened to interrupt the children's story.

"And let me tell you, Marshall," he said, raising his hand for silence, "God's birds are not here to be enjoyed by well folks alone. These little folks here do not know half my plans for the summer."

Marshall looked eagerly into his uncle's smiling eyes.

"I can't go on tramps," he said, with lips it was hard to steady.

"No," said Uncle, "not *yet,*" with strong emphasis on the last word. "But I know of no more interesting pastime for invalids than the study of birds. Why, with this big yard, with that mulberry-tree, which nearly all birds delight in, the elm-tree for the orioles, those pines for the cone-loving birds, and, this summer, Mother's sunflowers and marigolds for the goldfinches, you ought to have a veritable bird-yard," he ended enthusiastically.

"But our summers are so short here," said Marshall doubtfully.

"Then cultivate the hardy birds that stay with us in the winter, and the winter visitors that come down from the north."

But Marshall shook his head, smiling wistfully. "I don't know how to do that, nor how I

can study them, tied up here," he said sadly.

"That's just what I'm coming to," said Uncle, smiling cheerfully, and with a funny, mysterious twinkle in his eyes, which the children learned to know and love. "The big second-story veranda in front of your windows here, with the big pine at one end, and the elm at the other, just suits my purpose. Now I want to put up a bird-restaurant."

"A what?" cried a chorus of voices.

"Just what I say: a free restaurant for the birds right out there on the veranda, where Marshall can watch those that come and go. He can lie here and make notes for me to use in my books."

"Your books!" cried the juvenile chorus again.

"Yes, my books. I'm not always a musty, fusty, drug-smelling doctor! I have written a book or two about birds, and I mean to write more. And, as I was saying, I mean that Marshall shall help me. Besides making notes," he continued, watching with his professional eye the color come and go in Marshall's cheeks, "I have ordered an Eastman kodak and outfit" —But he got no farther then, for glad shouts

and clapping of hands drowned his voice entirely. When the noise had subsided, which it quickly did, in their eagerness to hear more, he continued, "And Marshall shall take pictures of the birds at their luncheon, and otherwise, to be used in those same books just mentioned. The nuthatch which Caroline found, or which found Caroline, will probably be one of your first subjects." And he pinched her rosy cheek still redder.

But Caroline wrinkled up her nose expressively. "Hm!" she exclaimed, "I guess I know how she looks. *I* don't want her picture!"

Marshall squeezed his uncle's hand tight, and let his eyes beam his gratitude, as he whispered rather huskily, "Then I'll be really helping with the books, won't I?"

And seeing the lad's eyes almost brimming with tears, Uncle gave his hand an answering squeeze, and exclaimed, as he jumped up from his chair, "Well, we might as well make some more plans while we're at it," and ran gayly down the stairs. In three minutes he returned, carrying several short boards and strips of bark.

"Why, Uncle," cried the chorus, "what have you got?" And they crowded eagerly about him, sure that some new pleasure was about to be proposed.

"Well," he began, in a funny, complaining tone, rubbing his arms as he set down the boards, "I don't think it's nice to invite company to spend the summer with you, and then not provide a room for them."

"Why, Uncle!" gasped Elizabeth, who never saw a joke. "You know you have a room! You don't *have* to sleep out on the porch! You said you *wanted* to!"

"To be sure," said Uncle gravely, while he winked at Mamma, "but the wrens and the bluebirds you invited to visit us have no place to themselves; at least, no place that they like, or could get without a good deal of trouble. So I've been over to the sawmill and lugged home all this building-material in my poor arms." And he rubbed his big strong arms that could have carried many times as much without an effort, and made a comical face, as if in pain, while Elizabeth stared so solemnly at him that even the little ones giggled, and Uncle

laughed merrily, as he patted her on the shoulder and told her not to worry about him.

"And now," he continued earnestly, "I want Marshall to draw some plans for some summer homes for our little guests. There must be quite a large apartment-house, or 'flat,' for the martins. But bluebirds and wrens are more exclusive, and prefer cottages all to themselves." So half in earnest, half jesting, he explained to Marshall, who was skilled with the pencil, what he wished him to do.

"After we have the plans," he continued, turning to Rob, who stood eagerly listening, "you and I will attend to building the houses and putting up the lunch-counter. The birds will take more readily to a house which is not freshly painted and is somewhat weather-beaten. So the sooner we get these in place the better. Above all, the birds like a house that is covered with the natural bark of the tree. I suppose it looks more home-like to them,—less as if man had a hand in it."

The next evening Marshall showed them the plans, which had kept him pleasantly occupied all day, and before the following Saturday the

houses were all in place, waiting for the little feathered tenants.

Marshall's room had windows on three sides. A long veranda ran along the west side, and at either end of this Uncle had placed a tiny bird-house. From the windows upon the veranda one could almost look in at the doors of the "martin-flats," high up on a pole, safe from cats.

"When they all come," laughed Marshall, "with the nuthatch at the back, I shall be surrounded by birds."

"Oh, let's name our place," cried Elizabeth. "Let's call it 'Bird Land.' I've always wanted to name it."

"Suppose we do," agreed Marshall. "But not 'Bird Land.' I don't like that."

"Sparrow Hall I think would be most appropriate," laughed Papa. "They are the most common birds about here."

"You just wait," warned Uncle. And the children received the suggestion with scorn.

"How about 'Nuthatchery'?" laughed Uncle. "They may be plentiful later."

"We won't name it for her!" cried Caroline promptly. "She's too cranky!"

"Suppose we call it 'Birds' Haven,'" suggested Aunty.

The children looked doubtful, but when she explained that a "haven" was a place of safety, the name was accepted with much applause. And Rob immediately planned to paint the name on a board, to be hung over the vine-covered entrance to the grounds.

CHAPTER III

OPENING DAY AT THE RESTAURANT

"There's somebody knocking. Hark! Who can it be?
It's not at the door! No, it's in the elm-tree.
I hear it again; it goes 'rat-a-tat-tat'!
Now what in the world is the meaning of that?
I think I can tell you. Ah, yes, it is he;
It's a young Master Woodpecker, gallant and free.
He's dressed very handsomely ('Rat-a-tat-tat!'),
Just like a young dandy, so comely and fat."

THE birds' restaurant had been in place for three days before it had any visitors but the English sparrows, who found it the very first day.

In case you may wish to build one, I am going to tell you how Uncle built ours. It was very simple after all. As Mamma thought that food upon the veranda would attract mice rather than birds, he built a circular shelf around the trunk of the elm-tree, which stood at the south end of the porch, where in winter it would get plenty of sunshine. The shelf was about a foot wide, so that no cat climbing up the

tree could get on top of it. Around the edge he nailed tin guttering, such as we use about the eaves of a house, to carry the water off of the roof. This was to serve both as a drinking-place and a bath-tub in the summer.

Marshall watched the little lunch-counter very closely, but only the sparrows came. On the third day, as he lay waiting for his luncheon, little James tiptoed into the room.

"Have ve birdies come to lunch yet, Marsh?" he asked hopefully.

"No," said Marshall, smiling at the eager little face peering out of the window. "Perhaps they don't know that luncheon is ready."

James looked at him curiously for a moment, and then, with a little gurgling chuckle of mischief, he seized Marshall's call-bell and rang it furiously. So wildly did he ring that Mamma flew to the room, pale with fear, lest something was troubling Marshall. And in two minutes every member of the family had gathered there, only to find the sick lad leaning back among his cushions, very comfortable and laughing merrily, while Mamma fluttered anxiously about him.

And James, somewhat frightened at the dis-

turbance he had created, explained shyly, "I dust rang ve birdies' lunch bell, Mamma." And, turning to the window, he cried, "And one's come, Marsh! One has come!"

"Sure enough!" cried Marshall, half rising from his couch in his excitement.

"Oh, Uncle, look quick! What is it?"

All the children crowded about the window, Uncle warning them back, lest they frighten the bird, which, however, did not seem a bit timid.

"Don't any of you know that bird?" he asked. "Surely you do." And he looked from one to another, but no one answered.

"Well! Well!" he cried. "I thought you would all know our little friend there." Then, raising the window very softly a few inches, he said, "Be very still, and perhaps he will tell you his name."

"Birds can't talk, can vey?" asked James in open-eyed wonder.

"Wait and see," laughed Uncle. "Maybe this one will say one word."

The little bird hopped about the trunk of the tree, cocking his head first on one side and then on the other. "Dee-dee-dee," he said softly, tasting a bit of bird-seed, while the chil-

dren listened breathlessly. Then, settling down upon a piece of suet that was nailed to the tree, he took a nip, looked pertly about, tasted another, and then, as if approving of this fare, he chirped shrilly, "Chick-a-dee-dee-dee. Dee-dee-dee-dee!"

"There, you heard him say 'chickadee,'" laughed Uncle as he closed the window. The older children clapped their hands softly with pleasure, but James looked plainly disappointed. "Not much talk, I fink," he grumbled.

"Did you ever hear what our great Emerson wrote about the chickadee?" asked Uncle.

And while chickadee thankfully, we believe, ate his luncheon, Uncle repeated:

"Piped a tiny voice near by,
Gay and polite, a cheerful cry,
Chick-a-dee-dee! saucy note!
Out of sound heart and merry throat.
As if to say, 'Good day, sir!
Fine afternoon, old passenger,
Happy to meet you in these places,
Where January brings few faces.'"

"What a dear little fellow he is! And so fat," said Elizabeth admiringly as the bird continued hopping over the lunch-counter.

"Yes, he wears a heavy coat of fat under his

feathers, and that helps to keep him warm enough to stand our cold winters," explained Uncle.

"He has a little black cap on his head," said Caroline, who was rapidly learning to observe.

"Yes," said Uncle, "sometimes we call it a mask, for it covers a part of his face as well as his head. Dear me," he exclaimed, real dismay showing in his face, "in our excitement over our restaurant I forgot what I brought home!" And while the children, eagerly curious, gathered about him, he put his hand into his breast-pocket and brought out a tiny, ruffled ball of feathers.

"I'm sorry, your little Majesty," he said to the pitiful little object in his hand, "that I forgot you, even for a few minutes. But you would have died if I hadn't brought you in." And, smiling at Mamma, who was not particularly fond of pets, but who, he well knew, would put aside her own wishes, mother-fashion, for her sick boy, he laid in Marshall's hand a tiny golden-crowned kinglet, with a broken wing.

"This is to be your care," he said to Marshall, who covered the little thing gently with

his warm hand. "I shall get him a cage, but when he is quite well and strong again I shall expect you to set him free. You will be surprised to see how many exhausted, crippled, or half-drowned birds you will find if you keep your eyes open, especially during the season when they are migrating; that is, making their long journeys north or south in the spring or fall. This one was probably injured in last night's storm. He is one of our smallest birds," he continued, as he began whittling two small, thin pine sticks. "Notice his crown," he said, laying his finger ever so gently upon the wee head. "The center, you see, is red, with a border of gold and then one of black. You have an unusual chance here to learn to know the little kinglet. He is so small, and his coloring so blends with the foliage of the trees, that, flitting about among them, one can scarcely keep him in sight long enough to examine him. We seldom get even a glimpse of his crown. There is another kinglet, called the ruby-crowned, who is almost like this little fellow, but his crown has no yellow or black upon it."

The little creature crouched low in Marshall's hand as they discussed it, a pitiful little object,

its feathers wet and bedraggled, its wee body throbbing with the violent beating of its heart.

"What you going to make wif vose sticks?" asked James, unable to keep silent any longer, for he dearly loved a bit of wood, a hammer, and nails.

"These," said Uncle, "are to be splints. I am going to set the little bird's broken wing and make it quite well again. We must take care of him until he is strong."

And while the little folks looked on with eager interest, Uncle quickly and skillfully "set" the little wing, and the crippled little "king" was soon comfortably settled in his new quarters, rapidly getting used to his strange surroundings.

While he worked, Uncle told the children many interesting things about the bird and his family.

"He was named 'Tyrannus,' " he said, "or the 'Tyrant,' by a Greek philosopher named Aristotle, who lived about three hundred years before Christ. You, Marshall, have probably read about him. In those days nearly all men who ruled a country, and so wore a crown, were cruel tyrants. And so this little fellow, who is

in no sense a tyrant, was so named because he wears a crown."

As Uncle was speaking, down beside the chickadee dropped another bird. Each child gave a start and a little cry of delight, for it was the ever-charming downy woodpecker.

"Oh," cried Sherburne, "I know him, I do. He's a kitty bird! A kitty bird wif a red bow on! I saw one down souf to my house, too, I did!"

"You're partly right," said Uncle, smiling down at the eager little face. "You did see one down 'souf' almost exactly like him. It was this little fellow's close cousin, the southern downy. It seems to me," he continued, turning to the older children, "that these little folks are quite as quick as you larger ones at seeing the distinctive points in the birds. You'll have to keep your eyes open or they'll get ahead of you. Now, I've always noticed that the downy reminded me of a kitten, especially when he's little; but I must admit that it took a child's imagination to make the red spot look like a red bow. Can any of you tell me how he differs from the red-headed woodpecker?"

"Yes, I can," said Rob, blushing a little, for it had not been so very long since he had "pegged rocks" at the "red-heads." "A red-head has red feathers all over his head, and a downy only has a few on the back of his head."

"That's not all," corrected Marshall, quickly. "A red-head has a black tail, and a downy's tail is black and white; and the black-and-white is more mixed all over him."

Uncle laughed at this rather "mixed" description, and as the downy flew away, well pleased with his dinner, he gave the children some colored plates of each of the birds, that they might compare them.

"But, Uncle," said Elizabeth thoughtfully, as she studied them, "I saw a little bird almost exactly like this on my way to school yesterday, but I didn't see any red on his head at all. Was it the southern downy?"

"Oh, no," said Uncle. "That may have been this little fellow's wife. She doesn't dress up so fine as he does. She has no red cap on her head. Who can tell me where the woodpeckers make their nests, since we are speaking of their wives?"

The children were silent for a moment. Then Marshall said doubtfully:

"They make holes in trees, and poles, and church-steeples. Do they use them for their nests?"

"Awfully punk nests they'd make, I think," said Rob slangily.

"Well, they seem to suit the woodpeckers," said Uncle. "At least, they use the same kind of a hole for their nesting-place. They bore straight backward for several inches, and then turn sharply downward. When they have bored as far as they consider suitable for a home, sometimes as far as two feet, the female lays her eggs upon the chips and dust made by boring the hole. This little pile of chips is all the bed a baby woodpecker gets."

"Poor baby woodpeckers," sighed Elizabeth. "I wonder how they ever get out."

"What makes them drum so on poles and steeples, Uncle?" asked Marshall. "Are they always making holes when they do that?"

"They seem to do that for the same reason that other birds sing," answered Uncle. "Because they like to, or, perhaps, to attract their

mates. Do any of you know the legend of the red-headed woodpecker?'' he asked.

''I do! I do!'' cried Elizabeth. ''We learned it in school.'' And while the others listened, much pleased, she recited the quaint little poem:

"A Legend of the Northland

"Away, away, in the Northland,
Where the hours of the day are few,
And the nights are so long in winter,
They cannot sleep them through;

"Where they harness the swift reindeer
To the sledges when it snows;
And the children look like bears' cubs
In their funny, furry clothes;

"They tell them a curious story,—
I don't believe 'tis true;
And yet you may learn a lesson
If I tell the tale to you.

"Once when the good St. Peter
Lived in the world below,
And walked about it preaching,
Just as he did, you know;

"He came to the doors of a cottage,
In traveling round the earth,
Where a little woman was making cakes,
And baking them on the hearth.

"And being faint with fasting,
For the day was almost done,
He asked her from her store of cakes
To give him a single one.

"So she made him a very little cake,
But, as it baking lay,
She looked at it and thought it seemed
Too large to give away.

"Therefore she kneaded another;
And still a smaller one;
But it looked, when she turned it over,
As large as the first had done.

"Then she took a tiny scrap of dough
And rolled and rolled it flat
And baked it thin as a wafer,—
But she couldn't part with that.

"For she said, 'My cakes that seem too small,
When I eat of them myself,
Are yet too large to give away,'
So she put them on a shelf.

"Then good St. Peter grew angry,
For he was hungry and faint;
And surely such a woman
Was enough to provoke a saint.

"Then he said, 'You are far too selfish
To dwell in human form,
To have both food and shelter,
And fire to keep you warm.

"'Now you shall build as the birds do,
And shall get your scanty food
By boring, and boring, and boring,
All day in the hard, dry wood';

"Then up she went through the chimney,
Never speaking a word,
And out of the top flew a woodpecker,
For she was changed to a bird.

"She had a scarlet cap on her head,
And that was left the dame,
But all the rest of her clothes were burned,
Black as a coal in the flame.

"And every country school-boy
Has seen her in the wood,
Where she lives in the trees till this very day,
Boring and boring for food.

"And this is the lesson she teaches;
Live not for yourself alone,
Lest the needs you will not pity,
Shall one day be your own.

"Give plenty of what is given to you;
Listen to pity's call;
Don't think the little you give is great,
And the much you get is small.

"Now my little boy, remember that,
And try to be kind and good,
When you see the woodpecker's sooty dress
And see her scarlet hood.

"You mayn't be changed to a bird, though you live
As selfishly as you can;
But you will be changed to a smaller thing,—
A mean and selfish man!"

PHŒBE CARY.

"Come, now," said Mamma, when she had finished, leading the way to the dining-room. "Your luncheon has been waiting while the birds had theirs, and 'Merica will give us a fine scolding if we are too late."

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILDREN MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF JIM CROW

"On the limb of an oak sat a jolly old crow,
And chatted away with glee, with glee,
And he saw the old farmer go out to sow
And he cried 'It's all for me, for me!
Look! Look! how he scatters the seed around;
He is wonderful kind to the poor, the poor.
If he'd empty it down in a pile on the ground
I could find it much better, I'm sure, I'm sure!'"

For the next few days little was talked of in the family but Uncle's plans, the grown folks catching the children's enthusiasm, and rejoicing at the happy light in Marshall's eyes.

In due time the camera came, and, with Uncle for teacher, Marshall soon learned to use it, snapping the twin cousins at their play, and any member of the family who rashly came within range. The Great Dane, who had been the children's companion and playmate since Marshall was a baby, was "caught," as he nosed curiously about the little kinglet, getting acquainted; and again later, with the wee bird

between his paws, where it finally came to snuggle down in comfort and security, old Dane nodding above it.

A week after Uncle proposed his plan, an express-wagon stopped at the house, and the children lugged in a box addressed to "The Marsden Kids." Inside they found short waterproof skirts for the girls, "slickers" and waterproof caps for all, and five pairs of rubber boots,—two pairs, tiny ones, for the twin cousins, their mammas having agreed that they might go on some of the shorter excursions. Besides these there were leather-bound notebooks, in which they were to keep a record of all the birds they saw. And, best of all, in neat leather cases, with shoulder-straps attached, were field-glasses for Marshall, Rob, and Elizabeth. Each case was prettily marked with the owner's name in tiny gilt letters, and the notebooks were marked in the same way.

"My! Uncle, you must have a lot of money to waste on us kids," cried excited Rob, while the twins pranced about the room, the rubber boots already on their feet.

"Not a dollar, Rob," his uncle answered gravely. "I do not expect this money to be

wasted, but to bring me in good returns. I intend each of you to get, besides rosy cheeks and good appetites, enough valuable information, with the aid of these glasses and this outfit, to more than repay me."

"What are these for?" asked Caroline, peeping through the wrong end of Rob's glasses, as she nestled against Uncle's shoulder and dropped a kiss upon his ear, to get his attention.

"We use them to study the birds from a distance," explained Uncle, turning the glass around. "If we try to watch them from close at hand, we frighten them away. With these glasses we could see even little King's crown from quite a distance, and perhaps he would never even know we had been watching him. Some birds will leave a nest and eggs if they see any one near it."

"Oh! Oh!" cried Caroline, interrupting him. "Smith's house is coming right up to ours!" and she put her glass down in astonishment, only to be the more puzzled when she saw the house just where it had always been.

"When are we going for our first walk?" cried Elizabeth impatiently. "I just can't wait much longer!"

"Weather permitting, to-morrow morning," answered Uncle.

"Oh, good! Good! Good!" cried the children, delighted.

As they spoke, little King, who had grown very tame during his imprisonment, hopped clumsily upon the field-glass at Marshall's eyes, and leaned far over the end, as if trying to peep in. At the sound of the rippling laugh that came from Marshall's lips, Mamma and Papa exchanged tremulous smiles and sent a swift look of gratitude to Uncle.

The next day dawned bright and clear, and immediately after breakfast, hastily swallowed by the impatient youngsters, Uncle leading the little party, they started upon their first "bird-hunt," as Rob called it. Uncle explained to them that later, when the little warblers began to come from the south, they should have to start upon their tramps at dawn.

How the boys laughed at the girls' awkward movements, as they proudly walked to the car in their rubber boots drawn quite up to their hips; for Uncle said that the woods would be wet, and the country roads heavy from the melting snow. They took an inter-urban car, and

as they rode Uncle talked to them about the birds they might hope to see so early in the spring. And the twins shouted with delight at every sparrow they saw in the muddy streets.

"Now," said Uncle, as they rose to leave the car, "what birds may we look for to-day, Elizabeth?"

"Snow-buntings, blue jays, chickadees, juncos, song-sparrows," she rattled off in one breath. "That's all I can remember."

"Very good, for a girl who had barely heard their names until last week," said Uncle, lifting the twins down the car steps, and courteously assisting the girls, which gave them a very grown-up feeling indeed.

In a few moments they were spattering through muddy roads, heads well up, and field-glasses already at their eyes, afraid they might miss something, and each one eager to be the first to make a discovery. The twins were utterly happy, wading every mud-hole unreproved, secure in their beautiful rubber boots. Each had slept the night before with a boot on the pillow beside him.

"Hark!" cautioned Uncle, putting up a warning finger. From somewhere near came the

sweetest bird-song that the children had ever heard.

"Oh, Uncle," whispered Caroline, creeping closer to his side, "it must be a little fairy. There isn't a bird in sight." And she held her breath to listen.

"Not one," agreed Elizabeth, "except that little old brown sparrow over there. They are everywhere," she added scornfully.

"Look closely at that 'little old brown sparrow,' " laughed Uncle.

"Oh, ho!" cried Sherburne, who was peeping through his uncle's glass. "He's got on a dirty shirt, he has!"

"He has, indeed," laughed Uncle. "And he always wears that kind of a 'shirt.' He is our well-loved little song-sparrow, and by that 'dirty' spot, as Sherburne calls it, you may know him from the other sparrows. Next May or June we may find his nest around here, built low in some bush, or possibly in a hole in a tree. Ah, there he goes. Now we may go on. To-night I will show you his picture, and that of some other sparrows, for there are some eighty-five or ninety varieties, and you may compare them."

"Oh," gasped Rob; "and I guessed four or five kinds!" And he grinned sheepishly.

"I see a mouse!" cried Caroline just then, tangling herself up in Uncle's legs, in a wild scramble for safety.

"A mouse!" laughed he, separating himself from her with difficulty. "Oh, I guess not."

"Oh, yes," insisted the child confidently; " 'twas climbing a tree."

"Could you have seen a field-mouse?" said Uncle, turning his glass toward the tree she pointed out. "Oh, I see," he said almost immediately. "Look again, Caroline."

"I see! I see!" cried Elizabeth. "It's a little brown bird! How funny it is acting! It goes round and round the trunk of the tree, poking its nose under the bark."

"Of all the stiff, hard-looking tails!" commented Rob. "Why, Uncle, he uses it to keep from slipping backward."

"Yes," said Uncle, who encouraged the children to make their own observations, "he does use his tail to support himself. You will find that nearly every physical peculiarity in a bird or animal has some use. This little bird is the brown creeper, the only species of the

creeper family, or Certhiidæ, that we have in this country. He has a funny habit, as Elizabeth noticed, of creeping around and around a tree, hunting for insects. When he reaches the first branches he flies down and starts up another tree. He does not often nest as far south as these northern or central States, but, if he did, I doubt if you could find his nest unless you were told where to look for it, for he tucks it away under a bit of loose bark on a tree. Men wise in the ways of birds hunted many years before they discovered the secret of its hiding-place. It always seems as if the bark clings too closely to the tree, even when loosened, for six or eight young birds to be comfortable in there. But Madam Creeper manages it some way. This little fellow is probably a winter visitor, and will soon be setting out for Canada, or the extreme northern part of this country, to build a nest and raise a family."

So the little party trudged gayly along, seeing many things new to them, and watching all the time for birds. Not many were out this cold morning, but they saw a blue jay, noisy, as ever, but beautiful in his deep-blue coat with its white

vest and black collar; a gorgeous red-headed woodpecker, or "union bird," as he is sometimes misnamed; and some snow-buntings; with all of whom they were familiar.

After half an hour's walk the twins complained of being hungry.

"And here is a farm-house," said Uncle, "where perhaps we may be able to get you a glass of milk, for I see some cows in the barn."

Entering the yard, he went around to the back door, where he met a young woman, just entering the kitchen after feeding the chickens. Before Uncle had finished explaining the children's needs, she was bustling about, bringing fresh milk and crusty doughnuts. The little ones ate hungrily, the crisp morning air having given them sharp appetites, and put bright roses into their cheeks. The farmer's wife asked many questions, and at last said, half shyly, "We have an orchard full of birds in the summer. You should come out here then. We always chased them away until some one told my man that they eat the bugs and cutworms that ruin our fruit. So one year we tried letting them stay, and we never had such fine fruit. And it was pretty to watch them

about the trees, too. My man watched them pretty close, and he said all the fruit they ate they was welcome to, for they must have et a million worms and bugs. Now we put up bird-houses instead of scare-crows in our orchard. Some folks think we're crazy, I guess."

Uncle clapped his hands softly. "Your husband is on the road to success, I think," he said, well pleased, "since he can so quickly and intelligently prove the worth of a new idea!"

As they rose to go, thanking her for her hospitality, she said timidly, "We have a pet the children might like to see." And going to the door, she gave a long, shrill whistle. In a moment, with a rush of black wings, in through the open door flew a splendid specimen of the American crow. He perched on his mistress's shoulder and stared curiously at the children with his bright, yellow eyes.

"He fell out of his nest when he was a little fellow," the woman explained, gently smoothing his glossy feathers as she spoke, "and my little boy being sick, my man thought it might amuse him to raise the crow. He played with him all summer, and then, in the fall"—she hesitated—"he was took,—my boy was. And

after that we couldn't bear to give up the crow. He's always free to go where he pleases, but I call him every day to make sure he isn't hungry."

While she was speaking the crow deliberately turned his back upon the company and sat with his tail contemptuously turned toward them. Little James, not understanding the mother's pathetic little tale, had crept around behind her, to get a better look at the strange bird. He broke the silence that followed with a shout of glee.

"He got it! He did! He did!" he cried. And, indeed, Mr. Crow had slyly pulled a glittering hair-pin from the woman's hair, and with a mischievous "Caw! Caw!" sailed through the still open door, his stolen prize in his beak.

"I'll never see that again!" the woman said a little, ruefully. "He is such a mischief! He steals everything he can lay his hands—no, claws—on. My husband can't find where he hides the things he steals, either, which makes it worse."

"Let's go find them for her," cried Uncle gayly. "Come, Rob, you and Elizabeth and I

will go in search of the den of Mr. James Crow, Robber.''

Their short, fat legs being rather weary, the little folks were glad to stay behind and enjoy unlimited doughnuts, while the others tramped off through the woods, gazing eagerly up into the branches of the tall trees. Uncle kept his glass at his eyes, scanning the trees ahead of him as he stumbled along. Suddenly from the tip-top branches of a tall bare tree sailed a coal-black crow.

''Mark that tree, Rob,'' Uncle shouted, as he rushed after the bird. ''He may have hidden something up there,'' he called back as he sped along. Rob tied his handkerchief to a twig, and soon passed Elizabeth, who was falling over stumps and fallen branches in a rash attempt to overtake Uncle.

After half a mile of running they saw him, standing very still behind a tree, one hand motioning to them in a way they later became familiar with and understood.

''What does he mean?'' asked Rob of his sister, seizing her handkerchief to wipe his perspiring forehead. ''Gee! but it's hot work running with a winter overcoat on!''

"Be quiet, I guess," she gasped, snatching the handkerchief in her turn, to wipe her own perspiring face, scarcely able to speak for lack of breath. So, slipping quietly from tree to tree, they finally came up behind some bushes not far from where Uncle was hiding.

"Where is he?" called Rob in a loud whisper.

Uncle pointed to a very tall tree, where, more than half-way up, sat Mr. Crow, busily engaged upon some business of his own. They waited for several minutes, and then, with an exultant "Caw! Caw!" the crow flew swiftly back to his adopted home. Uncle waited until he was out of sight, and then they all hurried to the tree.

"I'll wager that's the robber's den," said Uncle. "Can you shin up, Rob, or shall I?"

"Oh, let me," cried Rob eagerly.

"All right, but be careful," cautioned Uncle. "I don't want our summer fun spoiled by any broken bones."

But Rob was a good climber, city-bred though he was, gymnasium work having made him agile and given him a steady head. So, Uncle giving him a "boost," he was soon sitting astride the branch on which the crow had been.

"Look out below!" he cried, as he dropped a handful of dead leaves and twigs upon their upturned faces.

"Anything doing?" called Uncle, impatient as a boy.

"Not yet," said Rob, letting more leaves flutter down. Then, with a whoop of delight, he tossed down the hair-pin so lately stolen.

"By golly!" he cried. "Uncle, you just ought to see what's here!" And, much to Elizabeth's disgust, he began leisurely examining the things and dropping them into his pocket.

"Why, Uncle, I feel like I'd robbed a bank," he said laughing, as he slid down to the ground. "I think I've found everything she's lost for a year. And I'll tell you, Mr. Crow has got some surprise coming to him."

So triumphantly they tramped back to the house, where Rob laughingly unloaded his pockets. The woman's hair-pin was first dropped into her lap, then a silver thimble, now dull and black, a tiny pair of scissors, and an emery bag. "Used it to sharpen his beak upon," Rob suggested.

"Evidently your work-basket was his main

source of supply," laughed Uncle, as Rob laid down a little nickeled tape-measure.

"That," said the woman's husband, who had come in during their absence, "is one of the things the crow and our little boy played with. Charley would hold the case, and Jim Crow would pull the tape out as far as it would go, and then let it fly back with a snap. When it snapped he always gave a squawk and jumped about two feet in the air. But he was always ready to come right back into the game."

As the children laughed at this little story, Rob handed the delighted wife a quarter, a silver spoon, a kitchen spoon, and several bright bits of tin. At last he hesitated, then took reverently from his pocket the tin-type picture of a little boy.

"I expect you'll be glad to get this," he said, with boyish shyness of sentiment in any form, as he put it into her hand. It was a picture of the little lost son, who loved the crow.

"How very strange," said Elizabeth, as they walked wearily toward the car, "that the crow should have stolen a picture of his little playfellow. Do you suppose, Uncle, that the crow could see the likeness to the little boy?"

But Uncle, smiling, shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not," he said. "He is such a scamp that he doesn't seem able to resist the temptation to steal anything bright he comes across,—if, in fact, he ever tries to resist it."

So, well satisfied with their first tramp, they entered the car and rode home, their stomachs very empty, their minds very full of new ideas and interests.

CHAPTER V

A FEBRUARY WALK

"When he heard the owl at midnight,
Hooting, laughing in the forest.
'What is that?' he cried in terror,
'What is that,' he said, 'Nokomis?'
And the good Nokomis answered,
'That is but the owl and owlet.'"

Hiawatha. LONGFELLOW.

THE sun rising clear on the last day of February, as he peeped in at the windows of the Marsden home, met five eager faces peeping back at him. It was a sharp, cold morning, and Uncle, turning over for his last snug morning nap, was unceremoniously roused by two small feet planted firmly in the pit of his stomach, and a sturdy form settling itself upon his broad chest.

"'The birdies are up, Uncle. They's up an' gettin' their bekfus'!'" was shouted in his ear.

Uncle pulled himself reluctantly out of his dreams, made his great body very lumpy, and then, suddenly rolling over, tumbled little Jim

off among the pillows, and bounced Sherburne off onto the floor.

A hasty breakfast followed, and an hour later a merry party of young folks was tramping over the country roads.

"I do wonder what we shall see to-day," said Elizabeth, scanning the trees on either side, eager to be the first to see "a new bird."

"It looks woodsy enough for lots of birds," commented Rob.

"We are going straight into the woods," said Uncle, leading the way. "Now go softly, little folks. You may wander about where you please, but don't go out of calling distance. When you find anything interesting, call the rest of us. Use your whistles, and don't be noisy and frighten the birds." Uncle had provided the children with musical silver whistles, among other things, but, in their excitement over some discovery, they were seldom used.

With these brief directions, the children separated, and wandered happily about for half an hour. The twins, half afraid of the chill, silent woods, kept near their uncle. Rob had soon explored several tree-tops, peeping into last-year's birds' nests, and Elizabeth wandered

happily along, scanning the bare branches of the trees with her glass. Suddenly Caroline's lively feet, which had soon carried her far ahead of the rest of the party, were heard returning at a surprising speed, and Uncle was not a little alarmed to hear her give loud cries of fear as she ran, looking anxiously back over her shoulder.

"What was it, Caroline?" he asked, as he drew her into the shelter of his strong arm.

"It was an awful bird!" she cried, trembling nervously. "It had awful eyes and it turned clear around to watch me! I 'most believe it was a witch!"

"Ah, ha!" laughed Uncle. "So Mr. and Mrs. Owl are setting up housekeeping in these woods, are they? I wonder which Owl family it is. Let me see, this is the twenty-eighth of February. Now Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Owl like to go to housekeeping early. I wonder if it could have been he."

"Mr. G. H. Owl?" repeated Elizabeth, wondering if Uncle was making sport of them. "What do you mean, Uncle?"

"Why, Mr. Great Horned Owl, of course!"

he answered. "He goes to housekeeping as early as the first of February sometimes."

As he spoke they had drawn near the dwelling-place of the owls, Caroline keeping well behind her uncle's coat-tails.

"There he is," she whispered, as they came to a great oak-tree, one branch of which seemed to be dead, and showed a large hole in the side. Looking out from this hole sat Madam Owl, and by her side her husband. What great fellows they were! Almost two feet high, their large ear-tufts standing upright, their great eyes very wide open. Looking so solemn, they were enough to frighten any little maid.

"I thought owls slept in the daytime," cried Rob, surprised to see their eyes open.

"They do," answered Uncle. "And they do their work at night, for they can see in the dark. They have two pairs of eyelids, one pair of which they close when awake in the daytime. Besides this the eye is peculiar, because it is fixed in the socket and cannot be turned from side to side, as yours can. So the poor fellow has to turn his head around as far as it will go, and that is pretty far, whenever he looks about

him; or else he must turn his whole body. He can also tip it so far back that it rests upon his shoulders, and seems about to fall off. There is a funny story told,'' he continued in a whisper, ''of a little boy who walked around and around an owl, many times, staring curiously at it. The bird watching him, also curious, perhaps frightened, twisted his head around, following the boy's movements, until finally the unhappy creature twisted his head quite off!''

While the children were trying to suppress their giggles at this story, Uncle suddenly stepped out in full view of the owls, and, with a whoop, threw his arms about his head. With a blood-curdling yell that sent Caroline quite under her uncle's coat-tails, and made even Elizabeth shrink closer behind a friendly tree, the great owls, their soft, thick plumage making their flight absolutely noiseless, disappeared in the woods.

''I wanted you to hear their sweet voices,'' said Uncle laughing; ''and, indeed, I should not be sorry to frighten them quite away.''

''Why, Uncle?'' asked Rob. ''I thought you told us that owls are useful, killing snakes and mice and things of that sort.''

"They are," answered Uncle, "but this owl kills also song-birds, game-birds, doves, and young chickens. They do more harm than all other owls combined. Let's see if they have left any eggs in the nest."

So saying, up the tree like a boy he went, ran his hand down in the dark hole, and, much to his own surprise, brought up two funny, fuzzy, sputtering baby owls newly hatched. Caroline fairly screamed with delight when she saw their comical, sleepy faces, and the others begged to take them home for Marshall to photograph. After much discussion Uncle decided to carry one home to Marshall, and Rob promised to bring it back to its parents the next day, for, as much as Uncle wanted the owls exterminated, he could not make up his mind to kill these helpless little fellows.

As they wandered on, Elizabeth's attention was called to a little bird in a thorn-bush, fluttering about in a most peculiar way. Going closer, she gave a wail of dismay that brought Uncle quickly to her side.

"Oh," she cried, "some cruel, wicked boy has stuck a bird on a thorn, and the poor little thing isn't dead!" The tears stood in her soft

brown eyes as she begged Uncle to, "Come quick and take it off!"

"No boy did this, I am happy to say," said Uncle, as he tenderly released the unhappy little creature, who was impaled through one wing. "We probably frightened away a butcher-bird, or, to be more correct, a great northern shrike. See, here is another of his victims. This one is quite dead." And he showed them a wee field-mouse on a thorn. "Some believe that the shrike kills more of these little creatures than he needs, for sheer love of killing, but I think they misjudge him."

"Where do you suppose he went, Uncle?" asked Rob, eager to see this cannibal.

"Look for a bird about the size of a robin," Uncle answered, "high up on the branch of a tree, from where he can have a good lookout around him. He will be dressed in gray, with black wings and tail, and a black mark on each side of his head."

With glasses to their eyes, they stumbled along some distance farther, and then, as the twins were tired, and the others a little bit discouraged at not finding the shrike at once, they turned toward home. As they rambled leis-

urely along, scanning the tree-tops with their glasses, a shout from Rob, who was a little ahead of the others, attracted their attention. He was gesticulating wildly, pointing mysteriously above his head. As they drew near, high up on a branch they saw the bird they sought, far more beautiful than they had hoped to find one with so bad a name. In his soft gray, Quakerish dress, he did not look the part of a villain at all. His hooked beak alone gave him the appearance of a bird of prey.

"Oh, you rascal!" cried Uncle, playfully shaking his fist at the bird. "You may mean well, but if you would only use a different method of putting your meat in cold storage, you would be a more welcome visitor. Now you'd better be getting back to your northern home before any more of our little summer friends get back."

"What makes him put them on thorns, Uncle?" asked Rob.

"And is that why people speak of being 'on thorns'?" cried Elizabeth.

"One question at a time," laughed Uncle. "We think, Rob, that he has acquired this bad habit from the fact that his feet are so small

and weak that with them alone he cannot hold his little victims, such as mice and birds, while he tears them to pieces. So he fastens them upon a thorn, much as you have seen a butcher throw a piece of meat over a hook, and thus he prevents the little creatures from escaping while he tears them to pieces. If he would only kill what he needs for food at the time, it would not be so bad, but he is too good a provider, and puts more than he needs into his thorny cupboard. And the worst feature of all is, that he does not always kill them, but leaves them quivering there until they die, as he did the little one I put in my pocket."

"Oh, did you?" cried the children, much pleased.

"What kind of a bird is it?" asked Rob.

"Oh, let me carry it," begged Caroline.

But Uncle shook his head, saying, as he settled it more comfortably in his pocket: "It is a little song-sparrow, Rob. No, Caroline, we must be very careful with it. We will take it home to Marshall, and perhaps he can nurse it back to health, as only its wing seems to be hurt."

As he finished speaking, James' head bumped

against his, for the tired little fellow had fallen asleep on his shoulder, where for some time he and Sherburne had been taking turns in riding. So they hurried home, well pleased with their morning's adventures, and hungry enough to eat a second breakfast, which 'Merica had awaiting them. But first they must rush to Marshall, who was delighted with the "trophies of the chase," as he called the injured bird and the little owl, and give him an eager description of their tramp.

CHAPTER VI

A SNOW-STORM AND VISITORS

"Now I greet ye hardy tribes,
Snowy owl and night-black crow,
Starling with your wild halloo!
Blue Jay screaming with the wind,
In the tree-tops gaunt and thinned;

* * * * *

"Nuthatch, Snow-bird, Chickadee,
Downy trapper on the tree;
And you twittering goldfinch drove
(Masked in gray), that blithely rove,
Where the herby pastures show
Tables set above the snow.

* * * * *

"Winter comrades, well betide ye,
Friendly trunk and hollow hide ye,
Hemlock branches interlace
When the Northern Blast gives chase."

EVERY day found the restaurant more popular with the birds. As often happens in this northern part of our land, after a few days of almost springlike weather there came a spell of bitter cold. The morning of the twentieth of March dawned clear, but a heavy snow had fallen in the night.

When Marshall awoke and looked out upon the still, white world, he smiled mournfully at the little bird-houses almost hidden beneath their white burden, and wondered what his little feathered friends, accustomed to find their breakfast served upon their private lunch-counter, would do when they found that it had quite disappeared. While he lay looking out at the strange new world which had been born in the night, Mamma tiptoed into the room, followed by Uncle, armed with a broom and snow-shovel.

"Whatever are you going to do?" cried Marshall, wide-awake and eager.

"You didn't think I was going to let the birds starve this cold morning, did you?" answered Uncle. And going out on the porch, he began shoveling the snow in great heaps down upon the children, who were busily shoveling paths in the yard below. As might be expected, a commotion followed.

"No fair! No fair!" cried Elizabeth. "Don't you dare sweep that down on our nice clean paths!"

But her upturned face and laughing mouth received a shovelful of snow for reply, and her

further words were drowned in spluttering squeals.

Dropping her shovel, she began pelting her uncle with snowballs, and in another moment the whole party below had turned upon him, and he had much ado to defend himself against five eager enemies. Snowballs and clouds of snow flew thick and fast for the next ten minutes. Mamma stood by Marshall's bedside, almost trembling to hear his unaccustomed shouts of laughter when a well-aimed ball struck Uncle squarely in the face.

Uncle's ammunition was soon exhausted, and the veranda and lunch-counter in a few moments lay bare and clean, save for a few belated snow-balls sent after his retreating figure.

"We'll have some visitors to-day," said he to Marshall, as he took the birds' breakfast from Mamma's hand and began to sprinkle it generously upon the lunch-counter. "I wouldn't wonder if we had some unusual visitors," he continued, smiling mysteriously at the lad.

The children's work completed, they tramped in to breakfast, rosy and hungry, starving, one might have thought, to see the amount they ate. During the meal America appeared with

the announcement, "Mastah Ma'shall done said to tell you-all dat Downy, an' red-head an' dat sassy jay-bird, an' de cunnin' li'l chickadee," counting them off on her black fingers, "an' de sparrers done all had dey-all's breakfus a'ready."

"And," said Uncle gravely, at the conclusion of her long speech, "probably they would not have had any breakfast at all this morning if they had not found it at our lunch-counter. And very likely they would have suffered much through this cold spell."

"But we can't go for our tramp to-day," sighed Elizabeth.

"Not even in rubber boots?" cried Rob, much disappointed.

"I may take you older ones for a short walk," consoled Uncle. "But it is too cold and the snow is too deep for the little ones. I think even you older ones will find it pretty hard tramping to-day."

"Who is the 'little ones'?" cried Caroline, jumping up from her chair to put her arm coaxingly about her uncle's shoulders, hoping that she might not be in that class.

"I don't think that we shall see much," con-

tinued Uncle smiling, "but I thought it might be well for us to scatter a little grain, and put out some suet, where the snow is not too deep, in our nearest woods."

"You great-hearted fellow," cried Mamma, smiling at him. "I don't see how you can ever operate on people or do any of those dreadful things doctors have to do sometimes."

"I don't—much," he answered, laughing a little whimsically. "Not half enough to make me rich, at any rate."

When he and the children returned from their walk, America met them at the corner. "You-all is to go in the back way," she exclaimed, a quarter of a block away from them, pointing mysteriously back toward the yard.

Uncle's thoughts flew to Marshall in sudden alarm, but he was quickly reassured when she continued in a husky whisper, "Mastah Ma'shall done says as how dere's a flock of new birds in de pine-tree, an he's afeard you-all'll scar 'em away." Marshall's enthusiasm was plainly reflected in her kindly, shiny black face.

Snapping his fingers like a school-boy, Uncle exclaimed, as he led the children around to the



"JUST AS I THOUGHT. GROSBEAKS, AND CROSSBILLS, AND REDPOLLS" — *Page 79.*

back gate, "Pine-grosbeaks, siskins, or crossbills, I'll bet!"

America, catching the last words, answered: "Yes sah, deir bills is mos'ly all crossed, sah. Look lak dey makin' faces at you all de time."

"Good! Good!" cried Uncle, laughing at her description. "Now you'll see a pretty sight! I scarcely dared hope for so much good fortune."

And the children agreed with him when they gathered about Marshall's windows. There stood the great pine-tree, still bearing its burden of snow upon its dark green bosom, and flitting here and there among the branches, scattering little flurries of snow as they flew, were many birds of several kinds. Uncle's eyes sparkled as he named them to the children.

"Just as I thought," he cried. "Grosbeaks, and crossbills, and redpolls,—all come down from the north especially to make us a visit! What a harvest! It is far better than I dared to hope. Sometimes, when there comes a very severe cold spell, as now, these little fellows wander down here in search of food; and when they do, they are apt to gather in flocks wher-

ever they find the best feeding-grounds. In no other way would you be likely to see so many kinds of these little winterbirds together. There are three kinds which we do not have here in the winter except as visitors,—the crossbills, redpolls, and grosbeaks. The others that you see have probably been about the town or country all winter. Those are the first goldfinches you have ever seen in the winter, are they not?'' he asked.

''Goldfinches?'' questioned Elizabeth, peering about among the branches of the trees. ''I don't see any.'' Even Marshall looked puzzled as he scanned the tree for the well-known little yellow-and-black bird.

''Those little light olive-brown birds,'' explained Uncle, ''with just a suspicion of yellow about their heads and under-parts, are goldfinches in their winter plumage. They often stay about in the winter.''

''Well, I think they'd better change their names,'' laughed Rob, ''when they change their duds.''

''Those funny, crooked-nosed birds, Uncle,'' cried Caroline eagerly, ''what are they? They

don't look as if they could eat with their mouths all twisted that way."

"Are they hurted?" asked little Sherburne anxiously.

"No, no," laughed Uncle, tousling the boy's hair affectionately. "They are American crossbills. A long name, eh? You can see how they come to have such a name. Now watch them tear the seeds from the pine-cones and you will see how well they can use those awkward-looking beaks."

"Except for their beaks," said Mamma, who loved color, "they are beautiful birds. That soft, dull red of their plumage against the green-and-white tree is very pretty."

"Yes," agreed Uncle. "And what do you think of those other birds with brown wings and tails? They are pine-grosbeaks. Isn't that rosy-red plumage of the heads and tails beautiful? See how fearless they are. The female is not so pretty, as we shall usually find the case, with her brown and yellow tints. Notice their huge beaks that have given them their name of gros—or great—beaks."

"How funny," giggled Caroline, "to be

named for your looks! O dear, I shouldn't like to be named Caroline Longlegs!"

"Nor I Elizabeth Littlenose," cried Elizabeth, grasping that member in both hands.

"Well," cried Rob, in scornful superiority, "it's the way people used to be named, a long time ago."

Before he could finish his speech Caroline interrupted him, much to his chagrin, exclaiming, "Ho! Ho! Then you'd be Rob Freckleface if they did it now!"

But as Rob was forcibly suppressing her further remarks, and Mamma was quieting the tumult that had begun, Elizabeth asked, "What are those plump little birds with brown wings and tails and rosy breasts, Uncle? They are such cozy-looking little birds, so fluffy and soft."

"Those are redpolls," answered Uncle. "See how fearlessly they, too, fly about our lunch-counter. They are not at all timid. Ah," he continued, turning to Marshall, and laying his hand on the camera which stood close by his couch, "I see that you have been using this. Making any notes for me as well?"

"Yes; and, Uncle, I think that Trix has been

making notes of some sort, too. She has stayed in her cage nearly all morning, watching the birds, and has seemed just as if she understood something about them, or wanted to say something to them."

The little song-sparrow which they had rescued from the shrike, had become so tame that she was nearly always allowed the freedom of Marshall's room. Enjoying her cunning ways, the children had named her Tricksy, which was soon shortened to Trix.

"Perhaps there is a song-sparrow out there among the birds," suggested Uncle, his eyes searching the trees and the two or three birds on the lunch-counter.

Just then Sherburne's bright eyes spied a wee brown head on the perch of the wren-house.

"Come here!" he cried, much excited, falling over Marshall's couch in his eagerness to get hold of his uncle. "The wren's come! He's come! He has!" Flocking closer to the windows, the children startled the little creature, and he flew to a tree near by.

"There's the attraction for Trix," laughed Uncle, pointing toward it.

"It's another song-sparrow, one of her own

tribe, and Trix could see him from the cage."

"Poor little thing! How lonely it must have made her!" cried Aunty sympathetically.

"I wonder if he saw her," said Marshall.

"Was flirting with her most likely," said Uncle gayly.

All day they watched these strange little winter visitors that lingered about the yard and lunch-counter, and in his note-book that night Marshall had the following note:

"March 23.—Ten inches of snow and 15° above zero. At 10 A. M. appeared in our pine tree and on our lunch-counter pine-grosbeaks, American crossbills, and redpolls, from the north; also goldfinches and snow-buntings, which may have been around here all winter, but which we had not seen before, besides our usual visitors. We notice that the birds seldom visit the lunch-counter in flocks of various kinds at one time. Usually the larger and stronger birds, such as woodpeckers and blue jays, come first. Then follow the sparrows, and after them the smaller birds. At 3 P. M. the visitors began to leave, and at 5 P. M. were all gone."

CHAPTER VII

HOUSEKEEPING

"His mother was the Brook, and his sisters were the Reeds,
And they every one applauded when he sang about his deeds.
His vest was white, his mantle brown, as clear as they could be;
And his songs were fairly bubbling o'er with melody and glee.
But an envious neighbor splashed with mud our Brownie's coat and vest,
And a final handful threw, that stuck upon his breast.
The Brook bird's mother did her best to wash the stains away,
But they stuck, and, as it seems, are very like to stay.
And so he wears the splotches and the mud-blotch as you see,
But his songs are bubbling over still, with melody and glee."

The next day Uncle suggested that they should bring Tricksy's cage out-of-doors near the wren-house, that she might be cheered by a glimpse of the other song-sparrow.

"The snow is still deep," he explained, "and little Mr. Song-Sparrow can probably find more to eat here than anywhere else, so he will very likely come back."

So saying, he hung the cage on the veranda in the sunshine. Little Trix fluffed up her feathers and seemed somewhat disconcerted when she first felt the sharp, cold air. After a while she became much excited, fluttering about the cage and giving strange, loud calls. Soon the children saw the male sparrow in a pine tree, and in a few moments he was eating greedily of the free lunch, while little Trix tried in every way she knew to attract his attention. The children kept very still, and Marshall lay propped up with pillows, his hand on the bulb of the camera, its lens pointing straight at the bird-cage. When Caroline was growing very tired of waiting, and the twins had deserted entirely, the song-bird finished his luncheon, gave a funny little chirp or two, as if about to sing, fluffed up his feathers, cocked his head at Trix, as if to say, "What's all this fuss about, anyway?" and flew straight to her cage, as if that had been his first intention, and quite all that he had come for. At his approach Trix became more excited than ever, not attempting to conceal her delight, and, forgetting her sore little wing, fluttered from perch to perch, twittering noisily. The stranger made a few re-

marks to her, and then started to fly away. The little prisoner called frantically, clinging to the bars of her cage, and, after a doubtful moment or two he again alighted upon the little ledge around her prison. This time, still clinging to the side of the cage close by him, she twittered softly to him for a moment, then, proving again the old proverb that the "nearest way to a man's heart is through his stomach," she flew to her seed-cup, took a seed daintily in her beak, and presented it to her little lover through the bars of her cage. The children softly clapped their hands, delighted with the pretty little scene. The little suitor accepted her offering, and then flew to the top of her cage and poured out his love for her in exquisite song.

"Oh, let her out!" cried Elizabeth, pity for the little creature welling up in her heart.

But the little ones shouted, "No! No!" and Marshall looked questioningly at his uncle.

"It would not be safe yet," said Uncle, answering the question in the boy's eyes. "She could never escape from a cat with her wing in that condition. It is still too sore. So it would not be a kindness to set her free. Per-

haps she can coax Mr. Song-Sparrow to stay about until she is quite well again.''

And such proved to be what happened, for each day when her cage was hung out in the sunshine, with a cloth over the side toward the wind, the little male returned to his place on the ledge, she fed him dainties from her cup, and he always returned thanks in a burst of song.

On the fifth day after her little lover came, Uncle examined the injured wing, and, finding it quite recovered, he encouraged her to fly about the room to strengthen it.

The next day he hung the cage out-of-doors, with the door opened wide, while the children stood watching her, with eyes filled with tears. She had become a charming little pet, and it was hard to give her up. She did not offer to leave the cage, however, apparently not seeing the open door. But when Mr. Sparrow came she went straight to the door, and plainly coaxed him to come in. He resisted all her entreaties, however, and after she had brought him several seeds they flew away together.

''And that is the last we shall see of Tricksy,'' sighed Marshall, as he watched them go.

"Leave the cage out," suggested Uncle, when he noticed the wet eyes about him, "and she may come back to-night."

They followed his suggestion, and that night, when they carried the cage in, though no one had seen her return, Mrs. Trix was in her usual place, curled up on a perch. And every night for a long time she returned to her voluntary prison.

One morning in April she returned to the cage, looking very important and carrying a twig in her beak.

"Well! Well!" exclaimed Uncle. "Can it be that a song-sparrow will nest in a cage? She does choose the most unexpected places for her nest, but, as you boys would say, 'this would be the limit'! Still the song-sparrow is constantly surprising us. He has a variety of songs; he has no set pattern for his nest; and even when the little wife lays her eggs, she sometimes lays no two alike."

But after many trials at placing the twig, she flew away with it in her beak, probably to choose a more suitable place. The children wondered if she was as much disappointed as they were at her failure to nest in the cage.

April had been a busy time for the children as well as the birds, for two pairs of martins had set up housekeeping in the "martin flats," and two plump bluebirds had taken possession of the rustic cottage built for them, much to Caroline's amazement.

"For," said she, "we didn't mark it, and how could they know it was meant for them?"

Little Madam Nuthatch in the back-yard was very much occupied with some business of her own, out of sight of prying eyes, deep in the hole in the tree in the back-yard, from which she had routed Caroline so effectually.

And besides all these to be watched and studied, the little kinglet needed constant attention. He was quite well now, but for some reason which he did not see fit to tell, Uncle had not yet told the children to set the little fellow free.

And now in the very last week of April Marshall was awakened one morning by a burst of song that astonished him.

"A wren!" he cried aloud, for Marshall was familiar with many of our commoner birds. And, raising up in bed, he could see Mr. Wren standing on his housetop in his trim brown suit, neatly barred with black, his little tail held

at the most correct angle, while the song fairly gushed from his little throat. Having finished his "voluntary," he examined the little house from foundation to root. "Which wasn't a bit polite," said Caroline, "when it was given to him." But Uncle reminded her that he had Jenny Wren to please, and that was not always an easy task.

Satisfied with the little house himself, the little master did not wait for Jenny's approval, but at once began bringing twigs to furnish it. How he worked! Really he seemed, after a day or so, to have brought enough rubbish to fill the house, instead of furnishing the nursery. About five days after he began to work Jenny appeared. She made even a closer inspection of the house and premises than her little lord had done. She even clung to the window-screen and studied Marshall for a moment.

"All right, old lady? Am I satisfactory? Will I pass?" laughed Marshall.

Then chirping contemptuously, as if to say, "He's just some great harmless bird in a queer kind of a nest," she turned her attention to the house again, and soon began chattering irritably at Johnny, who had been anxiously fol-

lowing her about, telling him plainly, the children thought, that "she guessed she could make it do."

Then she went inside the little house and went to work. She spent some time pulling out many of the twigs Johnny had so laboriously gathered. These she threw scornfully to the ground, while her little lord, evidently new to the housekeeping business, looked on much distressed, occasionally bringing back one of the twigs and presenting it to her in deep humility. She always took them, dropping them contemptuously at once.

At last they flew away together, their day's work done, and Uncle, taking the box from where it hung, brought it in to show the children the little birds' wonderful work, quoting as he came:

"So the bluebirds have contracted, have they, for a house?
And a nest is under way for little Mr. Wren?
Hush! dear, hush! Be quiet dear, quiet as a mouse,
For these are mighty secrets and we must whisper them."

Pushing back the sliding top, he showed them the box, filled quite to the top with twigs. But from the little round door, to a corner at the back, Jenny Wren had made a neat little tunnel,

or "hallway," the children called it, and there, safely canopied by twigs, was the unfinished nest.

Uncle carefully replaced the little house after the children had admired the birds' work, and the next morning the little pair went happily to work again, never dreaming that the secret of their little home had been discovered.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHILDREN ENTERTAIN A STRANGER

"Along the glades, a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest."

THE last day of April dawned cloudy and disagreeable. The south, from which we feel we have a right to look for soft, warm breezes, had turned traitor, and was sending a cold, raw wind, with dashes of colder rain.

The children gathered about the breakfast-table their faces reflecting the weather, but hoping audibly that Uncle would suggest some delightful way to spend such a disagreeable Saturday. Their weekly holiday had come to be welcomed as the day for a tramp, and since Uncle came, when the weather proved too bad for them to go, they felt themselves personally ill used.

Their hopes of a tramp were quickly dashed to-day, and their faces grew woefully long, when Uncle announced, as he folded his napkin, that he should leave for the city on an early car,

and not return until dinner-time. His words were received with a wail of protest from the little folks, doubled and trebled when Mamma said: "Aunty and I are also going into the city to-day to do some shopping and visit our dressmaker. We shall lunch with Papa, and you would better join us."

The children were in despair. A whole rainy day without Mamma, Papa, Aunty, or Uncle! It was more than they could be expected to bear cheerfully!

"Take us! Take us!" cried the twins, quickly thinking of that way in which to solve their share of the difficulty.

And, as Mamma shook her head, Elizabeth asked, "Why, Mamma, who will take care of Marshall for a whole day?"

"I have arranged for Mrs. Wilbur to stay with him to-day," Mamma answered. "And Rob can help to entertain him for an hour or so."

Rob groaned, not at the task of entertaining Marshall, for he loved and admired his elder brother, but because he had no liking for the elderly woman in question, a sort of practical nurse, who no longer took charge of cases that

required any skillful nursing. She had several times taken care of these children when their parents were out of the city.

Caroline made a naughty face at the prospect before them, and Elizabeth frowned darkly, secretly resolved that Mrs. Wilbur should see very little of her.

"May I ask Isabel to lunch?" she asked hopefully, after a moment of silence. Isabel was one of her neighborhood companions, a merry girl, bubbling over with fun.

"Certainly," answered Mamma pleasantly. This settled, Elizabeth's face brightened a little. "And may we get luncheon?" she continued.

"I will arrange with cook that you shall help," said Mamma, smiling cheerfully.

"How will you boys pass the day?" asked Uncle, addressing Rob, who slouched over his plate with a disappointed face.

"I dunno," growled Rob, still cross at the prospect of Mrs. Wilbur's visit.

"Guess I'll go out with some of the fellows around here."

"You would better put on your boots when

the rain stops and go for a tramp,'' suggested Uncle. The boy's face brightened. ''Out past the old mill and through the marsh I think you might find something interesting.'' Rob looked up, smiling a little through his scowls.

The twins and Caroline were never at a loss for amusement, and were already planning frolics under their breath that probably meant trouble for Mammy Mec.

The four grown folks left early, and the children passed an uneventful morning. Elizabeth and Isabel were closeted in the kitchen behind locked doors, occupied with some weighty secrets,—or perhaps cooking secrets should be light ones,—and, to the boys' delight, at noon they served some very creditable dishes.

After luncheon Rob strode off in his high boots, feeling very manly and superior to the girls, who could not go out in such weather. The little folks, finding that the rain had ceased at last, left Elizabeth and her little guest discussing big-girl affairs, and went out in the yard to play. Nothing seemed interesting to-day, for some reason or other, and they wandered lonesomely about. At last they concluded to take

a little walk by themselves. They wandered off gayly, neglecting, of course, to put on their rubber boots.

Not far from their suburban home were several vacant lots, low and marshy, in which Uncle had told them they would probably see red-winged black-birds in the spring. Now these little folks imagined that bird to be a large and gorgeous creature with wings of brightest scarlet, spread wide as he flew. Of course they no sooner thought of it, than they must begin the search. In two minutes their thin shoes were heavy with mud, and soaking wet, but little they cared. On they tramped, and did indeed see a "red-wing," though they never knew it, so unlike it was the magnificent bird which they had imagined.

Suddenly to their ears came the strangest sound that they had ever heard in all their short lives. It was not a pleasant sound, and evidently came from a short distance beyond where they were standing. The little folks stopped short in alarm.

"What is that?" cried Caroline, grasping James firmly by a coat-sleeve. "It's in the ground!"

"Plunk-a-plunk!" came the strange sound again. "Plunk! Plunk-a-plunk!"

"It's only somebody pounding," suggested Sherburne. "Maybe somebody's cutting down a tree."

"No! No!" cried more timid Caroline. "It's something big, and *awful, and live!*" bringing out each word with more emphasis than the one before, the last one being almost drowned in a howl of fright, for she was thoroughly frightened.

"Plunk-a-plunk! Plunk-a-plunk!" came the cry again, distinctly.

"I-I-know!" stammered James, much excited. "It's a-a- b-b-*bullfrog!* Rob telled me all about 'em. Vey go like vat! Rob said vey do!" James always mispronounced *th* when he was much excited.

So they went cautiously forward a few steps, James assuring Caroline that "Bullfrogs don't bite, ever. Rob said so." Which definitely settled any doubtful question for James.

Suddenly rising "right up out of the ground," they afterward said, they saw the strangest-looking creature they had ever seen in the four or five years of their lives. His nose seemed to

be yards long, and pointed straight at the sky.

As they stood hesitating whether to go nearer, or run back home as fast as their short legs would take them, a shout from Rob, coming across the marshy lots, called their attention.

"Well, what are you kids doing here?" cried he. "You'll catch it! You're all covered with mud!"

The children looked down at their feet in a dismay that lasted but a moment, for Rob had spied the strange creature, and they all forgot muddy boots and future reckonings with Mamma. If they were to be punished by and by, no good could come of allowing the prospect to spoil the pleasure of the present moment. Such was their philosophy, at least.

When Rob had taken one good look at the creature, he was quite as eager as they were to examine it further. It sat very still now, having discovered the presence of the children, and though there were no reeds or rushes to hide him, as there would have been in his native haunts, he crouched down, vainly hoping that the children would go away without seeing him. But instead of that, they came nearer and nearer.

They were quite astonished to see that he did not attempt to get away, and were almost afraid to approach, lest he should turn upon them. But Rob suggested that he might be injured in some way, and step by step they came so near that the poor thing, in a very desperation of terror, made a clumsy attempt to rise. But he dropped within a few feet.

With a rush Rob was after him.

"Gi' me your cape," he cried to Caroline, snatching it from her shoulders as he raced past her. It was thick and wide, and he flung it directly over the creature's head, just as it was rising for the second time. Perhaps in the darkness and warmth of its folds the huge bird, for it was a bird, believed himself in safety, for he crouched quietly down, and in a moment Rob had him securely wrapped in the cape. The children at his heels, they tramped triumphantly home, very much excited, and Caroline very cold in her wet shoes and without her wrap.

When they reached home, a servant told them that Marshall was asleep, so they could not take their prize to him. They carried it to the barn, but could not find a box large enough to hold it.

At last one of the children made the brilliant suggestion that they take the prisoner to the bathroom. Perhaps they associated that room with a prison of some sort, having on several memorable occasions been exiled there themselves. So, very softly, or at least so they thought, they trudged up the stairs, muddy boots leaving ugly stains upon every step. They shut and locked the bathroom door, and then released the poor half-suffocated creature from its heavy wrappings. At first it sat in a heap, looking very unhappy, and completely dazed in the middle of the floor, while the children sat about gazing at it, and discussing its queer appearance in whispers. It would never do to let Mrs. Wilbur know what they had in there. Breaking in on their whispers came a loud knocking at the door and Elizabeth's voice demanding that she be admitted to the room, or told what was in there.

"We haven't anything that matters!" cried Rob, very angry with the servant, who had revealed what she knew of their secret.

At Rob's angry tones, the frightened prisoner, who had now got his breath, leaped upon



HE FLUNG IT DIRECTLY OVER THE CREATURE'S HEAD. — *Page 101.*

the edge of the bath-tub, giving a loud, harsh cry of fear. The small boys shouted with delight, Caroline shrieked, and Elizabeth gave a frightened cry from without, exclaiming at the same time, "Now, Rob, you just let those little ones out this minute! If you want to be killed yourself, you can, but you sha'n't let them be hurt, too!"

Her words were received with shouts of laughter from the children, more unearthly cries from the captive, and wild racing about the bathroom.

Outside of the door, Isabel and Elizabeth, not being sure whether the cries were of terror or of excitement, were clinging frantically together frightened, yet giggling.

At this point who, of all people, should appear but Mrs. Wilbur from Marshall's room, curious to know what all the racket was about, and ready to put the worst possible light on any prank of the children. She joined Elizabeth in angry exclamations and commands that they should "take that awful animal out of the house *at once*"; and, in the same breath, "not to dare to open that door and let the dreadful creature get

away!" At which, to her astonishment and further discomfiture, the children giggled more than ever.

America now joined them from the kitchen, and whispered excitedly that, "dem boys done got de debble in de bafroom!" And she was careful to stand within the adjoining room, her hand on the door-knob, ready to slam the door shut the moment the "debble" should make his appearance.

In the midst of the excitement, Mamma and Aunty opened the front door, and were met on the stairs by Elizabeth, with shining eyes and scarlet cheeks.

The uproar in the bathroom could be distinctly heard in the hall below, and as they hastened up the stairs, Elizabeth excitedly explaining all the way, they were met by Mrs. Wilbur, wringing her hands and nervously exclaiming that she didn't know why she ever came! She added that she didn't know that she was coming into a house where they allowed the children to keep wild animals in the bathroom!

Mamma asked anxiously for Marshall, and was told "The poor, dear child is bearing up pretty well, considering!"

The noise in the bathroom arose to a tumult as Mamma came down the hall. Such awful noises as the poor, tired creature gave vent to, were enough to frighten any mother. And those, mingled with the excited shouts and shrieks of the children, were calculated to make a stronger heart than hers quail. She shook the door. Something bounced madly against it and gave a blood-curdling yell almost in her ear. She shrank back. Then followed wild dashing of childish feet about the room.

"Rob! Rob!" cried Mamma. "Open this door at once!"

"I can't," cried Rob. "It'll get out!"

"What is it?" cried Mamma.

"I don't know!"

"Don't know?" cried Mamma incredulously. "Robert, what *have* you got in that room?"

"I don't know what it is, Mamma. Really, I don't!"

"Why don't you hold it and open the door?" was her next question.

"I can't catch it. It's on the top of the mirror to the chiffonier!"

"Hold him, Jim! Get a hold of his tail!" came the cries from within.

"It must be a coon," suggested Mamma, who had come from the south. "What else could climb so high?"

Another wild dash about the bathroom followed. The crash of breaking crockery and the splashing of water mingled with their cries.

"I've got him! No, I haven't! Look out! He'll bite you! Be careful, Caroline! Oh, Caroline's got him by the tail!"

"O! Ow! Ouch!" came Caroline's voice at its highest pitch. "It's come off—out—his tail! Oh, Rob, it's broke!"

"Ow! Ow! He's on my back!" in Sherburne's voice now. "Take him off—quick!"

All these cries came through the key-hole in quick succession, mingled with horrible, hoarse terror-cries from the tormented captive, and loudest shrill shrieks from Caroline, who loved excitement, and the sound of her own voice at its highest pitch.

In sheer desperation Mamma was just debating whether to send for a locksmith to open the door, some one with a gun to kill the unseen creature, or a policeman, when the front door opened, and in walked Uncle, smiling and calm. He came up the stairs two steps at a time, and

joined the excited little crowd about the door. In just about two minutes he had command of the situation.

"Robert," he said, as quietly as he could say it and be heard above the tumult, "open this door at once, or I shall break it in." And his great body leaning against the door made it creak ominously.

Rob began his excuses again, but his uncle's voice interrupted him.

"You heard what I said!" was all; but Rob recognized a tone that meant to be obeyed. Quickly the key turned in the lock. The door opened a very little bit. Uncle slid into the room and closed the door behind him. One or two more dashes about the room followed, and then the door opened and Uncle came quietly out, a poor, tormented bird in his arms, crouching down as if it knew that it had found a friend at last.

"This is all it was," he said, a wee twinkle in his eyes, as they flashed at Mamma, who gave one disgusted glance at the bird, and then looked beyond into the bathroom, as if still half expecting to see some awful animal in there.

Instead, four pairs of childish eyes returned

her shocked gaze. The twins, flushed and excited, their eyes shining, all unconscious what little sinners they were, rushed upon her, eager to tell the story. But she held them back, for they were muddy from head to foot.

Caroline in a like condition, her dress badly torn, stood the picture of guilt, with eyes cast down.

A sense of guilt for the first time rushed over Rob, as he followed Mamma's gaze about the room, and saw the havoc they had made.

Believing it to be a water-bird, they had filled the tub with water. It was no longer full. Flowers that had been blooming in the window lay upon the floor among the broken bits of pots and dirt. The mirror was broken. Towels that had been used to slap at the bird, to scare him from his high perches, were scattered about. Drawers had been opened in the search for towels, and their contents strewn upon the floor. Let us draw the curtain, or, to be more exact, close the door, as Mamma did, and hasten to Marshall's room as she did.

Uncle was there before her, showing the great bird to the boy, who had been obliged to lie

and listen to the noise from his room. The bird was a young American bittern, quite two feet high, a splendid specimen, save for its tail, now in Caroline's possession. His wings and back were a much-mixed black, tan, and brown. On each side of his neck was a beautiful velvety black "collar." His beak was long and strong, and, when sitting down, he pointed it straight up. When he crouched down, with his shoulders hunched up, he looked comically like a very old man with a tremendous nose.

Marshall was very much interested in the bird, and none the worse for the excitement, which, to tell the truth, he had rather enjoyed, knowing, from recollections of his own, that it was probably just some boyish prank.

When the children came sheepishly into the room, after a general cleaning-up, Uncle showed them the bird, and explained that it was probably making its first migration north. It very probably dropped exhausted from its long journey, in the lot where the children found it; otherwise they could not have so easily captured it.

The next day Marshall photographed it, and

then Uncle, attended by the children, carried it to a marshy place by the river, where he gave it its liberty.

Later in the spring, on one of their tramps, he and the children heard a bittern near the place, sounding its mournful cry for, as Uncle said, "Plum pudding! M-o-r-e- plum pudding!"

CHAPTER IX

A HAPPY DAY

"Nobody knew what on earth was the matter,
Or what such a babel of talk could allude to;
But nothing alarming
Heard those overhead, so
They found it quite charming,
And each of them said so;
For they'd all been south and they hadn't met
Since the autumn time, with its dull and wet.
So this was all that the babel meant;
They were askng each other with rapt intent,
'Where and how was your winter spent?'"

CLINTON SCOLLARD.

EARLY one morning in May, when the air was still so sharp that it made the children shiver when they dressed, Uncle came tiptoeing along the hall at the chilly hour of four-thirty, tapping at their doors, and softly calling to dress quickly and come to Marshall's room, for visitors had arrived in the night and might not stay long. The children, much excited, tumbled into their clothes some way, and hurried after him, eager to see who these strange new visitors might be.

They found Marshall sitting up in bed on the porch, where he now slept, camera by his side, field-glass in hand, impatiently waiting for a little more sunlight.

A soft mist hung in the air, tinted a rosy pink by the rising sun. Dew-spangled cobwebs draped shrubs and vines. The world was new and beautiful. Robins were calling, "Wake up! Wake up!" Orioles were making the air ring with their bell-like tones. The little wren, now well established in his housekeeping, was pouring out his whole soul in music at his front door. Swallows were gossiping merrily. And such a twittering and warbling as came from the pine-tree! The children's home was indeed well named "Birds' Haven." But where were the visitors? Only Uncle and Marshall were on the porch.

"Where is the company?" cried Caroline, rubbing her sleepy eyes.

"There," answered Uncle, pointing toward the pine-tree, where they saw a number of tiny birds of many colors, nothing about them suggesting dust-laden travelers, unless it was their appetites, though many of the tiny creatures had traveled a thousand miles or more.

"Those!" cried Elizabeth, a little disappointed and yawning openly, no pun intended. "Why, I thought it was company, not birds!" She did not relish being called from her pleasant morning dreams to see "a lot of little birds," especially when she had hoped to see some charming new cousins or friends.

But her ill-temper did not last long, only till she got the "sleep out of her eyes," for who could be cross with such a jolly party of little warbling guests about one?

"Why, Uncle," cried Caroline, remembering the time when the bird visitors had arrived from the north, "there hasn't been any snowstorm! Where did they come from?"

"No," answered Uncle, "these little birds here are on their way *to* the north. The others came *from* the north. These are wood-warblers, and, though not very fine singers, are most attractive little creatures, and many of them are beautiful. The female, in many cases being differently colored from the male, makes it seem as if there is an even greater variety than there really is. Little flocks of them often stop for a few hours on their way north, in some place where food is plentiful. Our big yard,

with its many trees, and the food which I put out after the storm yesterday, undoubtedly attracted them. It is a little unusual to find so many varieties in one place. Our hospitable yard must be getting a reputation. A few of these warblers will nest about here, but most of them will go farther north to raise their families. If you should go up into the pine woods this summer,'' and he winked at Mamma, who had joined the little party on the porch, ''you would find many of these little fellows nesting there.''

''There's a canary-bird,'' cried James, interrupting his uncle's long speech.

''A wild canary,'' corrected big sister.

''No,'' said Uncle, ''you are making a mistake which is often made by older people than you. This is our yellow warbler, commonly called 'summer yellow-bird.' He or some of his family will probably nest about here this summer.''

''What is that lovely bird all black and pink?'' cried Elizabeth, delighted with the beautiful coloring.

''A redstart,'' cried Marshall eagerly. ''I read about him yesterday. In Cuba they call

him 'Candelita,' or 'Little Candle Flame.'"

"See the little bird near him," said Uncle, "that is yellow where he is red. That may be his mate some day, for it is a female redstart."

"Why, Uncle!" cried Elizabeth; "and it is so entirely different!"

"Just another one of those cases," said Uncle, smiling, "where Nature clothes the female in duller colors, so that she may be safer upon her nest. See how they spread their fan-like tails, quite as if they appreciate their beauty themselves. Much as these girls here parade before the mirror, eh?" And he mischievously pulled Elizabeth's hair down around her eyes with one hand, and tousled Caroline's with the other.

"The redstart may nest here, also," he continued his little lecture; "and that little black-and-white fellow so busily hunting for insects. Of what bird does he remind you?"

"The brown creeper," said Marshall quickly, who had seen one in the yard.

"The downy woodpecker," suggested Rob.

"Yes," agreed Uncle. "I have been told that he is often mistaken for the woodpecker, and I think his motions are like the creeper.

That little olive-green bird, with yellow underparts and black on the sides of his face, the Maryland yellowthroat, may remain here, too, and possibly some others of that merry crowd."

The birds stayed about the yard nearly all day, as there were no cats to disturb them, and the children counted six varieties among them. This delighted Marshall, as it would add much to the record which he was keeping of the varieties of birds he saw, as the others were also doing, though he had little hope of winning the prize. But the lad was already dreaming dreams of cheerful words to be written some day for the comfort and cheer of other "shut-ins."

The warblers, and Marshall with his camera, having sole possession of the front yard that afternoon, the twins and Caroline sought amusement in the back-yard. Uncle warned them to keep away from little Madam Nuthatch's tree, for they knew that she now had a family of little bobtailed youngsters tucked away in the dark hole. Why else should she be carrying food down there? For once Caroline was inclined to obey, for she still had a wholesome respect for the little gray mother,

who had so bravely defended her home in the early spring.

They amused themselves in various ways for an hour or so, their games bringing them nearer and nearer to the forbidden territory.

In the midst of a glorious game of "tag," a harsh "Hank! Hank!" from just over their heads, made them stop their play in amazement. They stared above and around them, but, seeing nothing that they believed capable of giving such a cry, they returned to their game.

"You're it!" cried Caroline, taking advantage of the moment, when his attention was directed toward the bird, to give James a push and dart away.

"Hank! Hank!" came the cry again.

Once more they paused in their game. This time they discovered little Mother Nuthatch, with whom they had become tolerably well acquainted, almost under Sherburne's feet.

"I fought it was her," he cried, stooping to look at her more closely. For what could be the matter with the usually active little creature? "Oh, Caroline, look at her! Look! Look!" cried Sherburne, much concerned.

As he spoke, with a funny hitching motion,

her wing dragging pitifully upon the ground, the brave little creature scuttled under the last-year's grass and leaves about the base of the tree, giving pitiful little cries as she ran.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Caroline. "Our little nut-hatch has broken her wing!" And, indeed, so it would have appeared to an older and wiser person. "Help me catch her," she cried; "and we'll take her to Uncle and he'll set it!" So saying, she put her hand, as she afterwards said, "right down on" the little bird. But, lo! Mother Nuthatch was three feet away! Still tumbling and falling, to be sure,—almost turning somersaults as she went.

"Oh, the poor little thing!" wailed Sherburne, as he and James joined in the chase. "She's hurted awful!"

Straight across the yard she led them, and down into a little ditch that ran along the division-fence at the back of the yard.

"Let's go tell Uncle," cried James, growing discouraged, as again and again he put his hand almost upon her.

"I'll stay and try to catch her," suggested Caroline; "for she might hide, and then maybe we'd never find her again, and all her babies'd

die, and she'd die, too!" And Caroline drew a very tragic face.

Away went the twins. Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! went their sturdy feet up the back-stairs to Marshall's room. They found the rest of the family gathered on the veranda, watching Marshall, as he tried to get some pictures of the warblers. Their eyes bright and round with excitement, their cheeks very red, the twins seized Uncle by either arm, crying, "Come! Come, Uncle! Come quick!"

"What's the excitement now?" laughed Uncle, rising obediently from his chair. James, who stammered, looked appealingly at Sherburne, for this was a tale that must be quickly told.

"Our little nuthatch," cried Sherburne. "She's bwoken her wing, an' she's pimpling all around the yard!"

"Pimpling!" shouted Uncle, delighted with the word. "Pimpling! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Limping," explained Sherburne's mamma, gathering the discomfited little fellow into her arms, from where he promptly wriggled away. "Her wing is broken, did you say?" she asked.

"Yes," said James, who was started now.

"She dragged it in ve dirt, an' Carlun says it's broke!"

"Beware! Beware! She's fooling thee," laughed Uncle, in the words of a popular song.

Rob and Elizabeth had already raced down-stairs, and now came their voices calling excitedly, "Come down, Uncle! Please! The little nuthatches are out on the limb of the tree, and Caroline has lost their mother!"

Marshall looked at his uncle with anxious, questioning eyes, for he was much interested in the little nuthatch family.

"Come," said Uncle, very gently, laying his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

Marshall stared at him in amazement. It was a glorious May day, warm in the sun, and with no wind blowing.

"Come," he repeated firmly, putting his arm about Marshall's shoulders. "Come down-stairs and see the fun."

Marshall caught his breath in something between a sob and a laugh. For six months he had not gone about the house, and for many weeks had not even walked about his room. Uncle and Papa carried him to and from his indoor and outdoor bedrooms. A spirit of lassi-

tude seemed to possess the boy, which Uncle was earnestly striving to overcome. But though he had encouraged him to take an interest in many things, and to do a number of others that he had long ago given up, he had not yet suggested that he should attempt to walk.

So it came now as a surprise to all. Papa came forward, newspaper in hand, beaming encouragement. Mamma's face was radiant. When Aunty saw that Uncle was in earnest, she ran breathlessly down the stairs, snatching a soft quilt as she ran, and calling to 'Merica to bring the easiest chair out upon the back porch.

With Uncle on one side and Papa on the other, and with Mamma hovering about, Marshall walked to the head of the stairs. Then Papa and Uncle clasped hands and made a "basket," as they had often done in their boyhood days. Seated thereon, with his arms about their necks, Marshall rode triumphantly down the stairs, and was soon settled on the porch in the sunshine.

When he was comfortably seated, Uncle left him with Mamma and Aunty and old Mec, all striving to do something to make him more comfortable, and went into the yard to look after

Nuthatch affairs. He found the children still searching anxiously among the leaves.

"Why, Uncle," cried Caroline, with quivering lip, "when Rob and 'Lizbeth ran out and said the baby birds were out, I just ran over there for a minute, an' when I came back she was clear gone!"

"Let's go back and see the babies, then," said Uncle, smiling comfortingly.

"An' not hunt for her any more, Uncle? Why, her wing is all broke like this," dangling her arm loosely at her side. She thought Uncle could not be so hard-hearted as to let the little bird suffer, if he only understood.

"We'll look for her later, if you want to," he answered, leading the little procession back to the tree.

All about the nesting-hole was quiet, but, to Caroline's unbounded amazement, Uncle pointed out little Mrs. Nuthatch, with wing quite unharmed, busily feeding six little Nuthatches all in a row, on a branch some distance from the nest. She could scarcely believe that this active little bird, running over the tree, upside down or right side up, as best suited

her convenience, under or on top of a branch, now here, now there, could be the crippled little creature she had a few moments ago been chasing. She could scarcely restrain little squeals of delight.

The Nuthatch family was too far away from the porch for Marshall to photograph it, so Uncle was soon occupied in "catching them" in several pretty ways, for the little nuthatches were charming posers. Rob and Elizabeth were much interested in helping him, and Caroline and the twins went back and forth, like human pendulums, between the back porch and the tree.

What a happy time it was! One of those sweet, peaceful, never-to-be-forgotten days, that come occasionally to every happy family. Mamma and Aunty hovered about Marshall, anticipating every wish, and 'Merica waddled about, bringing him egg-nogs and milk, until he declared that he should soon be as fat as she, which should be all that he could wish.

The twins and Caroline soon tired of such quiet pleasures, however, and, seeking new amusement, wandered around the side of the house, from where their shrill voices, raised in innocent, childish chatter, amused Uncle im-

mensely when it reached his ears now and then.

"I had a kitty to my house," said Sherburne. "Name was Bluebell."

"We had one, too," said James. "She died dead!"

"I would like to have a kitty," said Sherburne, with a timid glance at Uncle.

"Kitties *eat birds!*" cried James, shocked.

"My kitty went to shurch," chuckled Sherburne. "Man carried her out by de neck. Toes all curled up,—tail all turned up,—so!" and he made a comical attempt to take the position.

"I bemember once our kitty bringed little cats," boasted James.

This was too much good fortune. For a moment Sherburne was silenced.

"Where are they?" he asked at last.

"In heaven," said James solemnly, with a very long face.

Sherburne accepted this with reverent silence. "I know where heaven is," said James, when no one spoke.

"Where?" cried Sherburne, plainly incredulous. "You been dere since you was bornded?" he asked.

"No, but I know," insisted James. "It's a hole in ve ground," he cried triumphantly, "'cause Mec said my kitties went to heaven, and I *saw* where vey went!"

Sherburne could not contradict such testimony as this, but after a moment's thought he ventured another remark: "I know how my kitty tooked a baf."

"I know how ours did, too," cried James scornfully.

"I can wash like our kitty," cried Sherburne, determined to astonish his cousin. He may have failed to do that, but he certainly astonished his uncle, who had slipped around the house to watch them for a moment, by sticking his little pink tongue far out of his mouth, and running it about over the neighboring surface of his none-too-clean face, almost reaching his ears in his violent efforts.

"I can eat like a kitty," was the next remarkable statement from James, lapping noisily.

"I can drink like a bird," boasted Caroline. The boys looked at her admiringly.

"Show us!" cried Sherburne.

Seeing nothing near that seemed to be suit-

able for a drinking-dish, she "hopped like a bird," the boys imitating, around the corner of the veranda, where America had placed a large, clean barrel to catch the rain-water. It was nearly full now, and Caroline, hopping upon the ledge around the outside of the veranda, and holding the edge of the barrel with both hands, leaned far over and proceeded to "drink like a bird" before her admiring audience.

But, alas! Her triumph was short! Her hand slipped. She clutched wildly, but could not regain her hold upon the barrel. Her foot slipped next, and over she went, balancing upon her stomach upon the barrel-edge, plunging wildly, and screaming at the top of her voice, her head one moment in the water, the next moment out of it. Of course her screams quickly brought assistance, and it was an astonishing sight that met their eyes. Nothing could be seen of Caroline but fluttering petticoats, and two long legs, each of these firmly grasped by a sturdy, determined, red-faced twin. As Uncle lifted the dripping child from the water, he was astonished to find Marshall by his side, erect, but pale and trembling at such unwonted excitement and exertion. Refusing any one's help, he walked

proudly back to his chair, amid the applause of the happy group.

Carrying Caroline into the kitchen, Uncle stood her in the sink to drip, saying to Mamma as he did so, "Now put each one of these kidlets into a padded cell until to-morrow, for we've had all the excitement we can stand." And Mamma, smiling through happy, unshed tears, said, as she carried her dripping little daughter up the stairs, "Who taught the children to study the ways of the birds, my dear?"

CHAPTER X

FIRE

"The calling, calling of the wild is in the air to-day;
You hear the calling in your heart though you are far away;
And your spirit leaps to meet it as a brook leaps to the fall."

ELIZABETH M. MONTAGUE.

"IT'S too hot to go to school!" grumbled Rob, one morning in May, when an unusually warm day or two had given the children a touch of spring fever. "I'd a lot rather go on a tramp."

"Oh," laughed Uncle roguishly, "it would be too warm for a tramp, wouldn't it? Think of the exertion, compared with sitting quietly in a schoolroom all day."

"Never too hot for a tramp!" cried Rob; and the others looked at Uncle with a question in their eyes, for a faint hope had dawned that there might be a possibility of a holiday for them.

"Saturday, kiddos," laughed Uncle. "One, two, three more days, and then—"

"Hurrah for Saturday!" cried the youngsters happily.

"Uncle says that somewhere near the school is a song-sparrow's nest," said Rob, as they entered the school-yard an hour later. "He saw it carrying a straw about here somewhere."

"I wish we needn't go to school, but might hunt for it," said Elizabeth.

"Gee!" exclaimed Rob; "I do wish something would happen to let us out!"

A little companion who had joined them, parodied an old song:

"I wish I were a little bird,
I would not go into school,
I would run far away,
Where I'd not be caught to-day,
And would not have to mind a single rule!"

The school-building was a large one, accommodating all of the children of the suburb. The halls were wide and cool, but the absence of any trees about the building allowed the rooms to become very warm in the spring. To-day pupils and teachers alike seemed to feel the effect of the weather. Most of the children

gazed idly out of the windows, and those who had any energy, devoted it to mischief. The slightest thing would set them to giggling. When one of the history class gravely informed them that "Henry the VIII got a divorce from the Pope," it set the room into an uproar of merriment.

The teacher stood by the open window most of the time, making a pretense of hearing the recitations, and vainly striving to get a passing breath of air. The children's shoulders drooped, and many of them dropped their heads upon their desks and pillowed them upon their arms.

Elizabeth's head ached with the heat, and her brain refused to solve the problems in arithmetic, or learn the Declaration of Independence. She thought of the merry tramps they had been enjoying all spring, of the cool, shadowy woods, and the merry warbling of the birds. She gazed out of the window, and away in the distance she could see the dark outline of some low hills which they had planned to explore some day.

As she sat wondering what new mysteries would be unfolded to them there, by sundry "nods and becks and wreathed smiles" it was

forced upon her consciousness that her red-headed admirer across the aisle was trying to gain her attention. Opening his closely-clasped hand a little bit, he gave her delightful glimpses of some mystery concealed just inside the opening of his pocket.

"Candy?" questioned Elizabeth in a whisper, at last becoming interested. The boy shook his head emphatically. Elizabeth glanced furtively at the teacher.

"Apple?" she whispered behind her atlas.

Again the red head shook a negative. Elizabeth thought a moment.

"Let me see," she whispered.

But the lad answered, "No, sir-ee," so loudly that Elizabeth glanced at the teacher, alarmed. But she was busy with a class on the other side of the room.

Even as the boy spoke, the something in his pocket plainly moved, and beneath his hand Elizabeth caught a glimpse of something soft and dark colored.

"Oh, a little bird!" she whispered. "Give it to me, please."

The boy grinned and leaned toward her. "Do you want it?" he said. "Sure?"

"Sure!" she whispered emphatically, thinking how pleased Marshall would be to have her rescue the little creature. "I'll take it home to Marsh."

The grinning lad leaned over and put into her hand, but fortunately without releasing his hold, the soft little bodies of two tiny field-mice.

Now Elizabeth had the average woman's dislike of a mouse. At the first glint of their sparkling eyes, the first squirm of a wriggling tail, she screamed. Only once, but it waked up the teacher. It roused the children. Elizabeth, covered with confusion, began to apologize.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she gasped, the tears coming into her eyes. But before she could finish, the teacher interrupted her. "Thomas, what have you?" she said to the red-headed lad, who was now blushing as red as his hair. But Thomas made no reply.

"Bring it here to me," commanded the teacher. At this command, Thomas rose doubtfully to his feet.

"I'd rather not," he gulped out finally. The teacher smiled. "I suppose so," she said.

"However, bring it here,"—more sternly this time.

"I-I-can't," the child stammered, growing more and more confused. "You-you-wouldn't want 'em!"

"Maybe not," agreed the teacher. "But, *obey me!*" The boy stumbled up the aisle, but turned toward the door. He might escape yet, he thought.

"Come back here!" commanded the teacher.

Thomas stopped and looked appealingly at Elizabeth, who sat flushed and teary. He hadn't meant to frighten her so much. He had not dreamed that she would scream. He wondered what teacher *would* do. He was ordinarily a good-hearted boy. He didn't want to frighten her, for more than one reason. But evidently she meant to be obeyed, and he moved slowly across the floor. She waited with outstretched hand.

Elizabeth had recovered enough to whisper, "Mice!" to her nearest neighbor, who had passed the word along. And now the whole roomful of youngsters waited in breathless expectation of what would happen when the mice were delivered.

"You won't want 'em," said Thomas again, making a final effort to save the teacher, and incidentally his own skin.

"Never mind!" said the teacher, growing tired of this foolishness.

The boy hesitated again, and then, with a last appealing look at Elizabeth, he laid the soft little creatures in the teacher's hand.

She gave one gasp, that was a scream killed at its birth. Then bravely, white to the very lips, she walked to the window and dropped the poor suffering mice down into the yard below.

"Now, be seated," she said to the boy. "Class, come to order!" to the giggling children, and dropped into a chair, too weak to give any further punishment.

The children soon settled down into their previous limp condition. The morning dragged long. The lessons were droned through. Suddenly three shrill clangs of a gong brought them upright, as if some one had touched an electric button that brought them to life.

"Fire-drill!" was the whisper that went around. The teacher smiled and flew to the door. A little girl skipped smilingly to the piano. Rob sprang to the door at the head of

the stairs, for he was one of the boys appointed to remain until his room was empty, and then make sure that no little folks were left there, or in the halls or cloak-rooms.

Every child was alert and smiling. Fire-drill had no terrors for them. And not one of them, or the teacher, thought of its being anything but fire-drill.

The gong clanged again. The children sprang to their feet. But before the third call came, borne on the hot midday air came the awful shriek of a siren whistle, the fire-alarm of the suburb! The teacher's face went white! Smiles faded from the lips of the children.

"Fire!" they gasped, in low, hoarse, unchild-like whispers. From far down the street they could hear the insistent gong of the fire-engines.

"Be quiet!" commanded the teacher sternly. "Don't move till the gong strikes!"

"Clang!" came the harsh alarm for the third time.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! We'll shout the victory!" the brave little girl at the piano played merrily on, her little fingers stiffening with fright, but never pausing.

"One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four," counted the teacher to the children's moving feet, her lips stiff and white, her voice shrill and unnatural. Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! Their feet on the stairs responded steadily to her count.

Nearer and nearer came the engines. The chief's buggy whirled into the school-yard, making the turn on two wheels.

Rob stood at his post till the last child reached the lower floor, and then, at a nod from the teacher, dashed off to the cloak-rooms.

The little girl at the piano never paused till the teacher cried, "Now, run! Run!" and fairly pushed her out of the door.

As Rob, beside the teacher, raced down the stairs at last, the huge engines and hook-and-ladder wagon dashed up to the building, their shrieking gong sounding far ahead of them. When he reached the street, the first person to greet him was his uncle, pale, but calm.

"Are they all out?" gasped Rob.

"Ours are," answered Uncle. "Now you're here, I've accounted for all of you."

"There isn't a kid left on our floor!" said

Rob positively. "I didn't come until I'd looked everywhere!"

"Brave boy!" said Uncle in a low tone that thrilled Rob's heart more than pages of praise from others.

The teachers gathered excitedly about the firemen, each one declaring that all of his or her pupils were safely out of the building. A crowd gathered, as such crowds do gather, like magic. Most of the children flew home to assure their parents that they were quite safe.

The firemen quickly spread the hose, and the fire-chief disappeared within the building, the principal of the school following him. Every one was asking every one else where the fire was and how it started, but no one seemed able to answer either question. In a few minutes the chief and the principal appeared again in the doorway.

"I had a 'phone message from the engine-house," the principal was explaining excitedly, "saying, 'Get the children out quick, and we'll be there!' And of course I didn't wait to hunt for the fire."

The chief's face was very red. "We can't

find any fire," he said. "*If any of you kids,*" turning to the clustering children, "*turned in a false alarm, I'll*"—but he left his threat unfinished.

The children looked from one to another. Then one boy said indignantly, "We ain't that kind of kids."

"I tell ye there ain't no fire," grunted the old janitor, who had joined them. "Leastways, this here school ain't afire! What ye reckon I'd be havin' a fire to-day for?" he asked indignantly.

"Some one sounded the alarm from your box on the corner there!" the chief declared emphatically. "There ain't no doubt about that!"

"The glass is broke," said one of the firemen.

"It's been broke for a long time," said a child's shrill voice in the crowd.

"Some place must be burning, and we're wasting valuable time," said the chief nervously, following Uncle, who, at the child's words, had started off toward the alarm-box.

The crowd surged after them. Uncle reached the box first, and, pulling away the glass, made a quick examination of the inside of the box.

To the chief's disgust and amazement, he leaned up against the post and began to laugh.

"What's a-eatin' you?" grunted the chief, not very elegantly, but very angrily.

"There," explained Uncle, as a little bird flew scolding about their heads; "there goes the guilty party." Then, pulling away the bits of broken glass still remaining, he showed them inside,—the nest and four young ones of a song-sparrow. But still the chief stared stupidly at him.

"Didn't you see that little bird fly out of there?" explained Uncle, addressing the crowd, and pointing to the still remonstrating little mother-bird. "She has built her nest in here. Doubtless she has gone in and out dozens of times without sounding the alarm until this time."

The chief looked about him at the crowd, and then laughing, a little ruefully perhaps, he said, "Who am I going to have arrested for sending in a false alarm? That little bird?" And the hot, good-natured crowd laughed with him, and one by one sauntered away to their homes, or business.

"Oh, Rob," cried Elizabeth, "do you remem-

ber what you wished? That we needn't go to school, but could hunt for the song-sparrow's nest instead?''

"We sure found it,'' laughed Rob. "I'll bet it's the very one we wanted to hunt!''

"And maybe it's our very own little Trix,'' suggested Elizabeth.

But the only way to prove that was to examine her wing, and that could not be done.

As the children and teachers, too, were much unnerved from the excitement, they were not called back for the afternoon session, so Rob had his further wish granted, that "something might happen to let them out of school.''

"Well,'' said Rob, as they discussed the "fire'' at supper that evening, "if my wishes are going to be granted like that, I guess I'll be mighty careful how I wish. I might be like the boy that was turned into a calf!''

CHAPTER XI

UNCLE TO THE RESCUE

"The blackbirds make the maples ring,
With social cheer and jubilee.
The red-wing flutes his 'Ok-alee!'"

Since Marshall's illness began, the days had never passed so swiftly or so pleasantly to him as they had since his uncle came, with his varied knowledge gained by much travel, much reading, and, most of all, by close attention to all that went on around him. He was a most interesting talker, and young folks loved him, for he seemed at heart as young as the youngest of them.

With him Marshall read many books on various subjects, but especially those on ornithology, for the birds were Uncle's hobby. The lad was astonished to find how interesting the little feathered creatures are, and how many of them came within sight of his bedroom window or the veranda.

As spring melted into summer the birds grew

daily more numerous and varied. He never tired of watching them, and wished from his heart that he might tell other "shut-ins" what opportunities for pleasure there were for them within sight of their very windows, if they would but look for them. As he grew stronger and able to take short rambles about the big yard, his boy friends, coming to see him, became interested in the birds, and the interest spread to a few invalids in the neighborhood.

One little boy, only seven years old, getting well after typhoid fever, sent word to Marshall that, lying on his couch by the window, he had counted twenty-seven varieties of birds in three weeks.

The little kinglet, having the freedom of the room much of the time was a constant delight, and Marshall did not like to think of the day when he must set the little fellow free.

Every Saturday, weather permitting, the other children took a long walk with their uncle. May, with its bright, sunny days, brought many merry warblers from the south, and clothed the trees with leaves. The woods were full of life. Tiny furry things scampered in the trees overhead and in the leaves under foot. The

streams were alive with flashing, darting fish; the trees and bushes with birds.

The children could scarcely resist the desire to run and shout, as they wandered about among all this life. And how they did wish that some kind fairy would teach them how to tell the timid little wood-folk that they would not harm them.

One warm afternoon they had come a long distance, expecting to remain and eat their luncheon in the woods. Before they had been in the woods an hour, Rob had rubbed the knees of his overalls quite through, and Elizabeth had left samples of her dress upon several blackberry-bushes,—all that they might peep into the heart of some little songster's home, or watch the little parent birds so busily building their nests. So the first hour or two passed pleasantly but uneventfully.

Then, lying upon his back, leisurely watching a hawk sailing majestically about above his head, Uncle was suddenly brought up standing by shrieks of real terror from Elizabeth. He sprang to his feet and ran toward the sound of her voice. They had been following the river, and her cries now came from the direction of the marsh.

It was a beautiful spot that she led him to. The water stood in pools here and there, sparkling in the glorious spring sunshine. Tall ferns fringed each little pool, and pond-lilies, not yet opening their sleepy eyes, lay upon the still bosom of the water. Tall rushes and unripe cattails nodded at their own reflections in the unruffled mirror. A more peaceful scene could scarcely have been imagined, save for Elizabeth's frightened cries.

Uncle found her standing in the marsh, the water almost up to her boot-tops, her face quite pale, her eyes dilated with horror. She stood so still that Uncle thought for one horrible moment that she was caught in quicksand, and his long legs speeding through the marsh seemed bound with chains. But he was soon reassured.

A half-decayed log lay in the water, partly hidden by rushes. Above it, gently swaying in the breeze, was the nest of a red-winged blackbird. The little ones, lately hatched, their little heads stretched above the nest's edge, were calling loudly for food.

On the log, changing this little scene of domestic harmony to one of hideous discord, lay a

huge water-snake, arch-enemy of the marsh-birds. His long neck was stretched far out, his horrid head raised high and swaying back and forth, now very near the nest. Uncle's face may have paled some, too, when he saw the ugly creature, and he quickly ordered Elizabeth back, though he knew well that she was in no danger from the snake; but there is something strangely repulsive to almost any one in a slimy water-snake.

The mother-bird fluttered wildly about the nest, giving strange cries of terror as she constantly drew nearer and nearer to those glittering eyes fixed on her little ones. The father-bird, his glossy black wings adorned with bright-red epaulets edged with yellow, flashing in the sun, flew bravely back and forth across the snake's back, screaming piteously, vainly striving to attract its attention to himself.

"Oh, Uncle," wailed Elizabeth, "why don't they fly away?"

"There are young in the nest," he answered. "The mother would give up her life for them."

As he spoke he splashed through the marsh, straight toward the snake. He had no stick or stone with which to kill it, but he threw up his

hands and shouted, hoping to frighten it away. Alas! He was too far away, or its attention was too firmly fixed upon the delicious dinner so near at hand. Its eyes seemed fastened upon the mother-bird now, and, as its slippery body glided nearer and nearer, the forked tongue flashed greedily in and out, as if already tasting the delicate titbits.

The male bird, as if recognizing in the snake the common enemy of bird and man, now flew toward Uncle, plainly imploring him, by calls and motions, to save his treasures.

The mother-bird at last dropped in despair to the nest, no longer shrieking her fear, but her whole little body shaking with horror of that awful thing so near. Her little heart seemed about to burst with its fierce beating. The hopeless terror in her eyes would have made the hardest heart long to save her.

Louder and louder were the little father's cries, as he dashed again and again at the snake, who paid not the slightest attention to him.

Back and forth swayed the ugly black head.

Lower and lower crouched the little mother, her head thrown back, her agonized eyes fixed on the beady black ones of the snake.

Nearer and nearer came the crawling, slippery body. Lower and lower swung the hideous head. The vital moment came! The head of the snake ceased swinging, was drawn far back to strike!

The little mother flattened herself above her little ones, her warm mother-breast shielding the precious wee things beneath her to her last breath.

But the snake was not to have things all his own way. Suddenly Uncle heard footsteps splashing toward him through the marsh. Then at his feet fell a huge stick, and Elizabeth's voice cried, "Kill it! Kill it! Oh, kill it quick with that stick!"

Before she had finished speaking, Uncle seized the stick, raised it high above the snake's back, and struck with all the strength of his strong right arm. The blow landed squarely across the back of the ugly reptile's neck, and with a horrible doubling, writhing motion it slid off of the log into the water.

With a shout of triumph Uncle leaped after it. In a very few moments the creature lay dead at his feet, still writhing, but forever harmless. When Uncle returned to Elizabeth

he found her quite unnerved and crying piteously.

"Come, come!" said he, patting her kindly on the shoulder. "You were a brave girl to come back with the stick. You mustn't give Rob a chance to laugh at you now. Come with me and let us see how the birds are taking their rescue. They ought to be receiving congratulations, and should thank you for being their deliverer."

They found the father-bird perched on a swaying cattail, pouring his heart out in a song of thanksgiving. The little mother bird still crouched trembling above her little ones, her eyes wild with fear.

Going back into the water, Uncle pushed the log far enough away from the nest to prevent another snake from looking there for his dinner. Then they left the little family to regain its composure alone.

For an hour they wandered about the woods, making interesting little discoveries here and there, when lively but silent gesticulations on Rob's part called them all down to the bank of a little stream that babbled merrily in and out among the trees.

"I saw the prettiest little animals just now," he whispered cautiously.

"They're over there in the bushes now. I think they'll come out in a minute." They watched silently for several minutes.

Then Rob continued, peering eagerly about; "I think it was a mink. The little ones were so pretty."

"A mink!" cried Uncle. "Oh, no, Rob; I don't think it could have been a mink, so near to a city as this."

And even as he spoke, a pretty little creature, not unlike a cat, and followed by three beautiful black-and-white kittens, crept noiselessly down to the stream to drink.

"There! There!" cried Rob, much excited. "See! there they are, Uncle!"

But he could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw his Uncle, whom he had never known to show fear of any animal, grasp a little girl in each hand and strike out through the woods on a run, without any regard for direction, and calling loudly for Rob to follow.

"Why, Uncle!" exclaimed Rob breathlessly, when at last his uncle dropped down upon a mossy bank, shaking with laughter. "Why,

Uncle, I wanted to kodak them for Marshall!"

"Oh, Rob! Rob!" he cried; "you surely had a narrow escape, and the rest of us also!"

Rob's face turned very red, for he knew that for some reason his uncle was laughing at him, and he did dislike to show any ignorance before the girls.

"I don't see why," he said a trifle sulkily. "It would have made an awfully nice picture." As, indeed, it would have done.

"I wanted one of those kitties," pouted Caroline, "to take home to the boys."

"And," complained Elizabeth, "you frightened us awfully!"

"Well," said Uncle, laughing apologetically, "I seem to have offended the whole family. But that is not so bad as it would have been to have offended one of those pretty 'kittens.' I had no time to explain my hurry, for, like 'time and tide,' skunks 'wait for no man.' "

"*Skunks!!*" cried the children in one voice.

"Yes, skunks, pole-cats, or 'seganku,' as the Indians call them, whichever name you like best. They'll answer the same way to any of 'em." Then, laughing again, he said, "Oh, Rob, if that little cat had seen you, you could not

have gone in polite society this summer! No, I am exaggerating," he corrected himself, "but let me advise you; never meddle with those pretty animals. Their only means of defense is to throw upon their enemies a most foul-smelling fluid, the odor of which it is impossible to remove from the clothing. Perhaps it is just as well that you saw them, for now you will know enough to avoid them. It is rather unusual for them to be drinking at this time of day."

Poor Rob, looking very shame-faced over his mistake, tried bravely to join in his uncle's laughter.

They ate their luncheon beside the stream, Uncle talking to them throughout the meal of the birds and animals they had seen, and the flowers and ferns and trees about them. All nature was his well-loved friend, and he enjoyed nothing better than pointing out her secrets to others, and discussing her wonders with them.

After luncheon they lay resting upon the grass under the great forest-trees, standing as they stood when the Indians wandered among them not so many years ago, when Uncle discov-

ered, hidden from all but the sharpest eyes, in a tangle of blackberry bushes near by, the nest of a yellow-breasted chat. Here, indeed, might be a treat for the children! Cautioning them to be quiet, he led them down into a little ravine, where he made them lie down upon the ground behind a fallen stump overgrown by vines.

They were barely comfortably hidden, when up from some ferns a little way off flew the male chat, alighting close by the nest. He was a handsome bird, his back, head, and wings of olive green, and his under-parts a beautiful golden yellow.

While the children lay admiring him, suddenly, more as if leaping than flying, he sprang almost straight up in the air, singing, if one could so call the ridiculous squawks that he gave as he flew. The children thought that they had frightened him, but, as if suddenly changing his mind as to where he wished to go, he flew back beside the nest. A moment's rest followed, and then, squawking and whistling, up he went into the air again, legs hanging loosely, wings flapping wildly, a most awkward and ridiculous-looking bird.

The children, their eyes very wide-open,

looked questioningly at their uncle, who was having hard work to keep from laughing aloud, not only at the comical antics of the chat, but at the solemn wonder in the children's eyes. "What is the matter with him, Uncle?" whispered Caroline, unable to restrain her curiosity any longer. "Has he gone *crazy?*"

"Oh, no," her uncle assured her, his broad shoulders shaking with silent laughter. "He is only doing that to entertain his little wife. It is lonely work sitting so long alone on a nest, so this bird entertains his wife."

Elizabeth's eyes opened wider than ever, and I am not sure that her mouth did not follow suit. "Why, Uncle!" was all she gasped.

As she spoke, the chat turned almost a complete somersault in the air, alighting, with his favorite squawk, very near his little wife, where he then stood, bobbing and bowing in a most absurd fashion, while his patient little mate looked on, sometimes as if bored, at others as if admiring him greatly.

When the children finally realized that the chat was only giving them a glimpse of his customary vaudeville performance, they could not suppress their mirth, and were obliged to

slip away, lest they frighten the happy pair with their giggling.

"Let me tell you what has been written of the chat," said Uncle, as they resumed their walk. And, rambling along under the trees, with his hat in his hand, a habit of his, he recited the following poem by Charles C. Abbott:

"A mournful cry from the thickets here,
A scream from the fields afar;
The chirp from a summer warbler near,
Of a spring-tide song, a bar;
Then rattle and rasp,
A groan, a laugh,
Till we fail to grasp
These sounds by half,
That come from the throat of the ghostly chat,
An imp if there is one, be sure of that!

"Aloft in the summer air he springs;
To his timid mate he calls;
With dangling legs and fluttering wings,
On the tangled smilax falls;
He mutters, he shrieks,—
A hopeless cry;
You think that he seeks
In peace to die;
But pity him not; 't is the ghostly chat,
An imp, if there is one, be sure of that!

"Afar in the gloomy swamp where flits
The will-o'-the-wisp by night,



RAMBLING ALONG UNDER THE TREES, WITH HIS HAT IN HIS HAND, HE RECITED A POEM. — *Page 154.*

The elf a-dreaming, restless, sits,
And mutters his strange delight,
In quavers and sharps,
And flute-like note,
With twang of harps
That swell the throat
Of the mystical, weird, uncanny chat,
In league with foul spirits, I'm sure of that!"

Caroline wandered away after a while, tired of watching the birds, and amused herself by gathering wild flowers, of which there was an abundance.

Pushing aside some ferns and last-year's leaves, she came all unexpectedly upon a charming little picture. Near the roots of a rugged old oak, close by the little brooklet, where slender yellow lilies bent their graceful heads to coquette with tall, lover-like ferns that swept their soft petals with a light caress; and where saucy johnny-jump-ups winked at the shy maiden-hair ferns, who nodded back at them, as if to say, "We know! We know something"; with all these loyal friends at hand to protect her precious secret, sat a bright-eyed oven-bird mother at the door of her little home. So charmed was the child with the beauty of it, that she stood motionless, for once, silent; and,

as if to complete the picture, through the leaves came, stepping daintily, the little father-bird.

Slipping quickly and quietly away, after a moment, Caroline ran to her uncle, much excited at her discovery, exclaiming: "Come! Come! Oh, Uncle, it is such a little darling,—the bird I've found. She was sitting there at that dear little door in the side," she explained, "and I almost put my hand on her! And the little papa came, too. And, of course I 'spect when I jumped up to come to you they both flew away. But the nest is here," she assured him, as she dropped to her knees beside it.

"Can you tell me what she looks like?" asked Uncle, knowing very well, as soon as he saw the nest, what bird had built it.

"Oh, yes," Caroline answered confidently. "She was such a *darling!*" Caroline loved that word. "She was a kind of a green on top and on her wings; and underneath she was white, with black spots. But he was the prettiest, for he had on the cutest little yellow cap—dark yellow—"

"Orange?" suggested Uncle.

"Yes, orange, with black stripes on each side. *Something,* just a *little,* like King's."

"Good!" cried Uncle, well pleased. "You are learning to observe. Now one peep at her eggs and then we must leave, lest we frighten her away. She may be watching us now. It is the little oven-bird, so called because her nest, with the little opening in the side, resembles an Indian oven."

The afternoon was now far advanced, and the children, tired with their long walk, hastened their footsteps and were soon on the car, speeding toward home, well pleased with their day's experiences. And as they rode home Uncle taught them the following little poem about the oven-bird, for he believed this to be one of the pleasantest ways for a child to learn the characteristics of the birds.

THE OVEN BIRD

"In the days of spring migrations,
Days when warbler hosts move northward,
To the forests, to the leaf beds,
Comes the tiny oven-builder.

"Daintily the leaves he tip-toes;
Underneath them builds his oven,
Arched and framed with last-year's oak-leaves,
Roofed and walled against the rain-drops.

"Hour by hour his voice he raises,
Mingling with the red-eye's snatches,

Answering to the hermit's anthem;
Rising, falling, like a wind-breath.

"Strange ventriloquism the music,
Far away when close beside one;
Near at hand when seeming distant;
Weird his plaintive accrescendo."

CHAPTER XII

THE WRENS' INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD

"With head up and tail up
The wren begins to sing;
He fills the air with melody,
And makes the alders ring."

C. C. M.

For more than a week wee brown heads had been appearing at the door of the wren-house. During the unusually warm weather the doorway had been so constantly blocked by a little head, sometimes by two, that Marshall began to be anxious lest enough fresh air should not enter to supply the other babies in the box. Uncle, fortunately, had built the little house with the roof raised about half an inch in front, and with several small holes in it, which is an excellent way to insure good ventilation.

When the two little heads were poked through the door, it really seemed completely filled, and this so often happened that the children wondered whether there might not be just two wrens in the box.

Mamma Wren did all the feeding now, and when her feet would alight upon the little house, what a clamor would go up from those hungry throats! At first the little heads at the door would instantly disappear within, and Mamma Wren would enter with refreshments. But, as they grew older, the babies would wait and beg for the dainty at the door, much as human babies do. They did not tease long, however, but when she told them in plain "wren Latin" that this time the titbit was for "Teddy" or "Susy," perhaps, they would scramble aside and allow her to pass in.

Marshall never wearied of watching this little act in bird-life drama.

From the day that the little wrens were hatched, Mamma Wren showed her great disapproval of company. She would allow no one to come nearer to her castle than Marshall's bedside, which was about twelve feet from the box. Marshall, however, seemed to be privileged, for she never scolded him. From the first day, when she had inspected and accepted him, she paid no more attention to him than she did to a post of the veranda, except when she imagined that her babies were in danger. Then

she would alight as near to him as she dared and scream frantically until help came. Let any one else come near, however, and Madame, without even dropping her babies' dinner from her mouth, would send forth a stream of abuse, which, if translated into English, would have been anything but polite.

One Sunday morning in the latter part of June, Marshall called Uncle from his newspaper and late breakfast to tell him that Papa Wren seemed to be staying at home over Sunday, and Mamma Wren was giving a strange new call to the little ones, which seemed to excite them vastly, and the meaning of which he could not discover.

"But there's sure something doing," he assured his uncle, just as the new call came loud and clear.

There stood Mamma Wren on the porch-rail, but a few feet from the wren-box, a fine, fat, green worm in her beak, held well out of reach, but in full view of the imploring little ones at the door.

"Why, she says, 'Come to Mamma,'" laughed Uncle. "Don't you hear it?"

At the words Caroline appeared at the win-

dow on the veranda, a new shoe in each hand, being engaged just then in the business of dressing for Sunday School.

"What *are* they doing?" she cried; and, at her words, the other children appeared also, in various stages of dress.

Aunty and Mamma had joined Uncle on the porch with Marshall, and now Elizabeth must have a ribbon tied, and Caroline her hair combed. Rob must have his necktie tied, and the twins were always present where there was promise of any excitement. So in a very few moments they were all gathered on the porch, watching the birds.

"He's coming out," cried Caroline through Uncle's fingers, which had been quickly clapped over her mouth.

And, indeed, one little wren had struggled so violently to reach his dinner that one wing was forced quite through the door. But my! How he scurried back into the security of his own little home, frightened half out of his wits at his wonderful feat. The big green worm dangled invitingly near. Mamma Wren called in sweet, encouraging tones. Papa Wren, in the vines below, sung glorious songs of a world

of sunshine and liberty. Another mighty struggle toward the worm. Horror! One little foot was quite out upon the perch! He hung there for a moment, and then made a quick movement back toward the refuge of home.

But alas! He had not calculated correctly, and, after a breathless moment of fluttering, stood upright upon the perch outside the door. Oh, the beautiful, great, green world! The blue, blue roof above, to which he was sure he could fly! The dark green-carpeted floor! All, all called to him to come. The wonderful wind through the trees almost blew him off the perch. How important he felt, as he straightened himself and fluffed up his feathers.

Mamma Wren now flew to the top of the little house and held the titbit dangling temptingly above him, all unconscious of the many eyes watching her. The little son stretched his small neck eagerly, reaching his best for that delicious green worm, until he looked quite over the top of the house, his broad mouth wide-open, never doubting that mother would fill it.

Alas! Back went Mamma with her dainty! Oh, the indignation in that small son's body! Every feather seemed to bristle with anger.

What an angry chirp! What a way to speak to Mother! A lively flirt of that small excuse for a tail, and—alas, for those who lose their temper!—he lost his balance, and off he went,—down, down, down! But, quicker than the eye could follow his motions, he caught himself, and, with an upward swing of his body, up he went to the top of the little house.

"Well done!" cried Uncle under his breath, softly clapping his hands.

"Well done!" sang Papa Wren from the elm tree. And what a petting little Wren Jr. got from Mamma Wren. She popped the rather shopworn-looking worm down his hungry throat, and plainly said a few wren words of praise. Then she dressed his ruffled feathers tenderly, and away she flew to talk it all over with Papa Wren.

"Ya-ay!" wailed the baby. "Ya-ap! Don't leave me all alone!" And, tumbling wildly off the roof of the house, amid the applause of the entire audience, human and bird, away he flew, swift and true, to the elm tree, mother, father, and dinner.

Two little brown heads were still in the round

door, calling loudly for "Mamma," who paid no attention to them whatever.

The hour for Sunday school came, and the little Marsdens were loath to go and leave such a fascinating entertainment; but the grown folks were firm, and very reluctantly they started off upon their wheels. Twice they returned on some trivial errand, really for one more peep at the birds.

Down under the trees the parent-birds were very much occupied in teaching the lone little explorer the ways of the world. Now and then Mamma Wren would bring a worm and fill a little gaping mouth, but she did not once call the little ones to leave the box.

"That call," Marshall said, "was entirely different from any other, and he would know it anywhere."

Not until the children returned at noon, flushed and excited, eager to hear the latest news of the Wren family, did Mamma Wren renew her efforts at launching her little ones upon the world.

Soon after their return, she appeared with the same kind of a fat green worm, and the

same coaxing call. In ten minutes little Wren No. 2 was out upon the perch, and two brown heads were still in the door. This little fellow took one good look at the green world about him, and, perhaps overcome by its promised joys, lost his balance and fell, fluttering wildly down into the vines below. Mamma Wren dropped like a dart after him, where she seemed to consider him very well off, and, after giving him the green worm, she returned at once to her third darling, with the usual offering and coaxing call. He came out very quickly, hesitating less than either of the others.

"Perhaps," said Marshall, "he has been taking notes, and is profiting by their experiences."

And still there were two brown heads in the door. Mamma Wren went off for a little while now, perhaps to get her own dinner, but soon returned with the usual dainty.

"I wonder," said Caroline, "if the little wrens like nasty green worms as we like candy."

While Mother Wren was coaxing the fourth young hopeful, Mr. Marsden came home to dinner and was immediately gathered into the circle.

Little Wren No. 4 did not falter long, and again the children shouted that there were "still two heads in the door."

"How could she have raised so many in that small place?" wondered Mamma, who liked plenty of room for her family. "What obedient children they must have been to get along in such close quarters!"

Papa, who had just left the hot streets of the city, thought it was remarkable that none of them had died from the heat.

While they were watching No. 5 hesitating anxiously upon the brink of this new strange world, the maid came to say that dinner was served.

"Oh, no," cried Elizabeth. "You come and see the little wrens coming out." And Mamma, seeing that it would be hard to tear them away from this fascinating corner so long as a brown head peeped out of the box, kindly made room for the girl in their circle.

While she stood hesitating, away flew No. 5, and now No. 6 and 7 were crowding one another in the door.

"Ten little, nine little, eight little, wrennies," chanted Caroline, while the others joined in,

and Rob wound up with, "two little wren-heads still in the door."

So, amid much happy chatter, they watched until seven little wrens had left the home-nest.

"Won't they ever come back?" asked Caroline, with a very long face, as the last little bird flew away, and left the little bird-house looking very empty and deserted.

"Not this year," answered Uncle. "Next year those, or some other wrens, will probably nest here again. Sometimes, however, they do raise two broods in one summer."

"Oh, good! Good!" cried Elizabeth. "I'm sure they'll come back here if they do. They've had such a good time here."

As she spoke 'Merica appeared at the door. "You-all's dinne' 's gwine get all cole," she grumbled. Spoiled, as she had spoiled Mamma's children, the kind-hearted old nurse said about what she pleased, and the family laughed. So now, they trudged meekly out to dinner at her call.

"Uncle," said Rob, at the table, a little later, "why was that last wren so much stronger and better able to fly than the first one? He didn't hesitate at all."

"Robert," said Uncle, laughing, "that's just what I was thinking of asking you, for I'm sure I don't know. But you kids always can get in ahead with the questions."

CHAPTER XIII

MARSHALL ENTERTAINS

"Spring once said to the nightingale,
'I mean to give you birds a ball,
Pray, Ma'am, ask the birdies all,
Birds and birdies great and small.'"

"MARSHALL will be sixteen years old next Saturday," announced Rob, one warm June morning at the breakfast table. "I asked him how he wanted us to celebrate, and he just frowned and said, 'Oh, forget it! Shut up!' I haven't seen him so cross in a long while."

Mamma sighed, her heart aching for her sick boy, who still felt himself so unfitted for festivities. Papa looked troubled, and rustled his newspaper, as if about to make a remark, then thought better of it, and said nothing.

"I wish it were one of our birthdays," rattled on Rob thoughtlessly, "and then Uncle would think of some dandy picnic or something. But we all have 'em in the winter."

"But how about Marshall's?" asked Elizabeth, hopeful of some festivity. "His is now."

"Poor Marshall!" said Uncle. But the tones of his voice were not so sad as his words, for he was growing more hopeful every day that Marshall would yet be a strong and healthy man. "He has been wonderfully brave," he concontinued, "and I suppose he thinks that he ought to be allowed to get in the dumps once in a while. But he mustn't. There is nothing better than inward—except outward—sunshine, for curing this body's ills. Yes, we must all put our wits to work, and think of some way of brightening his birthday."

Nothing further was said upon the subject just then, but all afternoon, when visiting a few patients whom he had taken in the suburbs, Rob's words kept recurring to him, "Uncle would do something."

It was late in June. The weather was warm and pleasant. Marshall was making wonderful improvement in the summer sunshine, and now walked about the house frequently, and sometimes ventured into the yard, with Uncle's arm for a support. But Uncle thought he was not yet strong enough to venture on a picnic, so all afternoon he turned the matter over in his mind.

When he came home that night, he and Mamma shut themselves up in the library for a long time, a proceeding which aroused the children's curiosity to such an extent that 'Merica told them that "dey-all bettah watch out, fo' cur'osity done kill a monkey once."

The result of the conference was the announcement from Uncle that Marshall was to have a *party!*

"Marshall? A party!" cried the astonished youngsters. "Why, how can he give a party? He can't even go to one!"

"Yes," said Uncle, enjoying the excitement he had created, "he can give one. This is to be a birthday party, and a dandy one, too. It will not be a very large affair, and you youngsters will be expected to entertain the guests, the majority of whom will not be able to entertain themselves."

For three days the children were very busy with their preparations. The party was to take place on Marshall's veranda. One end had been curtained off for a stage, for the entertainment was to be somewhat in the nature of charades. This end of the porch had a window opening into Mamma's room, which window would be

used as an entrance and exit to the stage. Mamma's room was to be the dressing-room. Cards had been issued, reading thus:

MARSHALL MARSDEN,
AT HOME
"BIRDS' HAVEN."
2 P. M. to 5 P. M.
TO MEET THE BIRDS. CHARADES.

All morning of the day of the party, the children, with Uncle's help, were very busy decorating the stage and arranging the veranda. Marshall's bed had been carried inside, and a number of easy-chairs were scattered about, with low chairs and camp-stools placed here and there among them.

It was a queer collection of guests for a boy's party, that arrived promptly at two o'clock. A dozen of Marshall's classmates were there, and the rest of the guests were chosen from Uncle's convalescent patients, who had become interested in the birds through hearing him talk about them.

First of these came the little boy who had counted such a variety from his chamber-window. A little crippled girl of Elizabeth's age came next, and after her came a charming old

English gentleman suffering from the gout, who told them many interesting facts about the birds of old England. A young man troubled with rheumatism hobbled over on his crutches. One or two other semi-invalids followed, and were soon all comfortably seated, rapidly getting acquainted with the strong young girls and boys scattered among them. A merry crowd it was, and among the merriest were some of those who were not well.

The children distributed some beautiful colored plates and illustrated books of birds to the guests, and Uncle gave them a short and jolly talk on the subject, during which the twins and Caroline wiggled and twisted, impatient for the crowning events of the afternoon. And when he announced that some living pictures would now follow, they bounded off to the dressing-room.

As each picture was to represent some bird whose name the guest must guess, they were allowed to retain the books and plates to assist them, for most of them were astonishingly ignorant of their native birds.

When the curtain was drawn aside a very fat, very black, and very large negro "baby" was

revealed, dressed in a long brown gown, and creeping around and around an imitation tree-trunk made out of brown paper. After circling the "tree" several times, this remarkable baby sprang to his feet and raced off the stage to the dressing-room, where he was caught in Aunty's arms and hugged close, and the little black face kissed, "even before the black was scrubbed off," as James said, and Sherburne's red cheeks brought to the surface once more.

Marshall, who was not in the secret of the pictures, quickly guessed this one, but, not thinking it quite polite for him to guess the first one, he kept silent, and was rewarded by hearing the little crippled girl say shyly, "Could it be the brown creeper?"

The little audience was quite delighted with her happy guess, and applauded loudly, immediately entering merrily into the game.

The next time the curtain was drawn, Elizabeth and America, who was thoroughly enjoying the fun, appeared side by side, and sang softly one stanza of a familiar song. When they bowed themselves off the stage so quickly the audience was completely mystified. Some of them guessed it was "some kind of a black-

bird." Even Marshall ran over the names of many familiar birds, but was still in the "dark," when one of the young men, with conscious pride, exclaimed, "I've got it! I know! the black-and-white warbler!"

His guess was received with much applause, and the children hastened to put on the next picture.

This time Uncle announced that the charade was to represent two birds. It was some time before the children had things arranged to their satisfaction, but when they did draw the curtain it was upon a gorgeous scene.

Rob appeared seated upon a "throne" [a big armchair covered with bearskin from the living-room.] On his head was a magnificent "golden crown" [gilt paper], set with a huge "diamond" [a vinegar-cruet stopper], in the middle of the front. Big red "rubies" [Caroline's glass beads] studded the sides. About his shoulders was a fur cape of Mamma's, with the lilac silk lining outside. He wore short velveteen trousers, pumps with big gilt buckles, and some pink silk party-stockings of Mamma's, through which he was fast poking his toes. On the floor beside him sat James in his very best

little black velvet suit, and also in crown and robes. The company quickly guessed the king-bird, but it required many hints from the children before they recognized in James the kinglet.

The next scene showed Sherburne with sleeves rolled up, a sofa pillow inside his blouse to give him a big stomach, and a long white apron on, that reached from his chin to his toes. In his hand he brandished a huge carving-knife. Altogether he was a charming and plump little butcher. On the table before him lay a leg of mutton, which the children had found in the ice-box, ready for to-morrow's dinner, and this he slashed with a right good will; which unrehearsed performance disturbed Mamma not a little. And in the middle of the scene old 'Merica's voice was heard exclaiming in a loud stage whisper, "Heah, you-all done ruint dat leg o' mutton! Who tote it out dar anyway? 'Twon't be no good at all if you-all cya've it 'fo' it's cooked!"

The curtain was hastily drawn, and several voices from the audience were heard at once, crying, "The butcher-bird! The butcher-bird!"

The next time the curtain was not raised, but a large picture of a turkey was pinned upon it, and then it was left to the old gentleman from England to suggest the oven-bird!

A cat borrowed for the occasion, and cozily curled up in the basket in which she had traveled from the neighbor's, represented a catbird.

Caroline, dressed in a little green gown and singing a simple little ditty, while she endeavored to balance an orange upon her head, was revealed as the orange-crowned warbler.

Another scene showed James noisily drinking water. In his violent efforts to make as much noise as possible he choked, and had to be assisted from the stage, Rob vigorously pounding him on the back the while. The guests, thinking the choking and pounding a part of the scene, guessed all manner of things, among them the whip-poor-will, and at last "gave up." To their surprise it was not the rare bird they expected, but only our simple little swallow.

Elizabeth, dressed in a blue dress of Mamma's represented the indigo-bunting; and Rob and Elizabeth, each handing the other a one-dollar bill, were quickly guessed as the American crossbill.

Several other pictures followed, and all were received with much laughter and fun.

When Elizabeth had made her last appearance upon the stage, she slipped away to the kitchen, where a most wonderful salad, which she had made "all alone," was awaiting the finishing touches.

At the last moment the ingredients must all be put into a large bowl and thoroughly mixed with a dressing. This, too, she must do alone, as well as to serve it on Mamma's very best salad-plates.

When Sherburne and James had finished their parts in the charades they followed her. Their wee noses were always turned up and sniffing like rabbits when baking was going on, and they could always be found in or near the kitchen.

They were bothering no one this time, however, for they had found some soap and were seated quietly enough upon the back steps, blowing bubbles.

Elizabeth hastened to don her dainty white apron and set about mixing the salad. How snowy-white the dainty cubes of celery, apples, and chicken looked as she poured them into the

big yellow bowl and stirred them all up with the tempting walnut-meats.

As she poured them all together, holding them high, to enjoy watching them rain down, she spilled a few upon the kitchen-table. For a few moments she was dismayed; then, noting the snowy whiteness of the oilcloth cover, she hastily gathered up the scattered bits and added them to the rest.

The charades were now over, and luncheon was to be served early, as Marshall and the rest of the guests must not be tired. Elizabeth and Caroline, who could be trusted with "unspillable" things, made pretty little waitresses, in their white dresses and lace-trimmed aprons, as they tripped in and out among the guests, bearing the silver trays heaped high with good things.

Very proudly Elizabeth brought in her salad. Papa, always proud of his children and anxious to encourage their little accomplishments, beamed upon her as she served him, and, slipping an arm around her, said, "You made this salad, didn't you, daughter? Some salad, this!" And he took a generous serving of the tempting dainty.

Elizabeth, blushing rosily at so much notice, murmured a scarcely audible "Yes."

"It certainly is fine," said the English gentleman, taking a generous taste. "You won't need any cook long."

Several others echoed his words of praise, and Elizabeth was radiantly happy.

Amid the merry talk and laughter one young man suddenly presented a pained and crimson face to Marshall, his mouth covered with his napkin, and his eyes rolling about in search of a near-by door.

"What *is* the matter?" said Marshall anxiously in a low tone. "Are you choking? What can I do? You'd better"—

But the boy interrupted him. "N-n-no, no!" he mumbled through the folds of his napkin, his face now so red as to be almost purple. "Ph-php-thp. 'M not thick! Got get out. 'Scuth me." And, springing from his chair, and falling over another, he bolted from the room and down the stairs.

"I'll call Uncle," began Marshall, but the boy was out of hearing.

However, Uncle, seeing that there was trouble of some kind, followed the lad.

Before they returned, a pretty young girl, also very red and confused, and holding her napkin pressed over her mouth, fled abruptly from the room, trying to excuse herself as she ran. Mamma this time followed anxiously, while the guests tried to appear as if nothing had happened.

At the head of the stairs Mamma met Uncle returning, his shoulders shaking with merriment.

"Don't be frightened," he said, as he passed her; "it's only *soap!*"

He came out upon the veranda, still laughing.

"Young ladies and gentlemen," he said. "I beg of you not to eat any more salad. Oh, no! no! It isn't poison," he added hastily, as the forks dropped to the plates with a noisy clatter, and more than one young lady turned pale.

"No, don't be frightened," he continued; "you have eaten nothing worse than *soap!* Some way we can't imagine how, some little bits of soap got mixed with the salad,—"

"Oh, Uncle," cried Elizabeth, springing to her feet, and sending one young lady's dish of salad spinning across the floor, "I didn't,—I-I-

did not,—I *never* put any s-s-soap in my salad!" The last words ended in a wail.

But Uncle put his arm about her, and she hid her face in his coat-sleeve and burst into tears.

"I don't know how it happened," Uncle repeated, patting the child's shaking shoulders with little comforting pats, "but I'm glad to say it's nothing worse than Snow Soap, '99 and 45/100 per cent pure,' as I believe they advertise."

But a little culprit had crept in behind him, and, not understanding the trouble, peered into the dish which Uncle now held in his hand, and remarked in a stage-whisper, "I cutted my soap for bubbles dust like vat!"

"What!" cried Uncle, seating himself and drawing the child to his knee. "Did you put soap into the salad, Jimmy?"

"No, tourse we didn't," cried Sherburne indignantly, coming forward to his twin's relief. "Tourse not we didn't! We only cutted 'em into a pan o' water!"

"But first on ve kitsen table," amended James in a shy whisper, from Uncle's arm, where he had hidden his blushing face.

When they were questioned they agreed that they "might have left a few pieces of soap in some dish on ve table."

But when the guests were gone, Elizabeth confessed that she had gathered up the pieces which she had dropped upon the oilcloth cover, and very probably gathered up some of the bits of soap with them, thus generously sharing the blame, if there was any, with the little boys.

Some of the good-natured guests, seeing how unhappy Elizabeth was over the mishap, insisted upon eating the salad,—with the greatest care, it must be admitted,—and comforted her by pronouncing it delicious, and treating the affair as the crowning joke of the afternoon.

"In fact," said one kind-hearted young lady, "I don't believe many people could make as nice salad as that if they had to put soap in it."

When Elizabeth slipped away to the kitchen as soon as she could, she found the two young people who had gotten the mouthfuls of soap, convulsed with laughter, having a gay time rinsing and re-rinsing their mouths, and, to the twins' unbounded delight, vying with one another to see who could blow the biggest bubbles through their lips.

The guests all went home in gay good humor, insisting that it had been a delightful party, and "so original."

And Elizabeth secretly wondered which part of the entertainment they considered the most original.

CHAPTER XIV

A STORM AND A SECRET

"Hush! 'Tis he!
My oriole, my glance of summer fire
Is come at last; and ever on the watch,
Twitched the pack-thread I had lately wound
About the bough to help his housekeeping,
Twitches and scouts by turns, blessing his luck,
Yet fearing he who laid it in his way."

THE last of June brought hot, dry weather. Schools were now closed, and the children free to go on long rambles through the woods and meadows any day they wished.

Uncle often went with them, though sometimes the larger ones were allowed to take short tramps by themselves. Though they enjoyed being trusted to go alone, they enjoyed more the tramps that were taken with him.

For a week or more, however, he had not been able to give them an afternoon, on account of some mysterious "business," that seemed to be taking a great deal of his time.

This afternoon was to have been theirs, and

their disappointment was keen when heavy clouds gathered and thunder rumbled in the distance. The clouds gathered so rapidly, and the sky became such a strange greenish color, that Mamma and Aunty declared emphatically that it was too threatening for the children to leave home. So they wandered about the yard, restless, and uninterested in their usual pleasures. The air, so hot and full of electricity, made them strangely depressed.

Even the home seemed lonely and unlike itself. Something unusual was going on, and the little folks for once were not "in it." The grown folks had little time for little folks' troubles or pleasures. Swift glances passed continually between them, suggestive liftings of eyebrows, and wise nods of heads.

Marshall was "in it," for he lay often smiling at nothing, or asked a half-hidden question of Mamma or Uncle.

After much discussion among themselves the children decided that the something secret was something pleasant.

Mamma was unaccountably busy and spent much time in the attic, but she was cheerful. Stranger still, Aunty's door was closed to little

visitors. Papa and Uncle had just returned from a second mysterious trip away, which was not called a "business trip."

"What is it all about?" the children asked each other for the hundredth time, as they gathered in the big living-room, where they always came, perhaps feeling strength in numbers, when a storm was gathering.

"I'm sure it's something nice, Buff," said Rob, continuing a conversation begun out of doors.

"Yes," answered Elizabeth thoughtfully; "and Marshall knows what it is."

"Sure he does. Say, he's looking better this summer, Buff. S'pose Uncle's goin' to cure him?"

"Of course," answered Elizabeth confidently. "Maybe that's it," she suggested after a moment's silence. "Of course that would make 'em all look happy."

"But they needn't be whispering in corners about that," argued Rob. "And they'd tell us that."

"No," struck in Caroline, between bites of bread and butter that she had coaxed from 'Merica. "And Uncle is always starting to

say somethin', an' nen Mamma puts her finger on her lip, so,'' looking very wise, and lifting her eyebrows in comical imitation of her mother. ''An' nen she says, 'Now-ow, Hal' ''; and she drawled the words till the others shouted with glee.

''Maybe they're going to operate on Marsh,'' said Rob, after a little silence, and in a faint voice, for he had long nursed a secret dread that something of that kind might be done to his brother.

''That wouldn't make 'em look *happy!*'' cried Elizabeth, horrified.

''I forgot that,'' agreed Rob, in a relieved tone.

''No,'' cried Caroline, choking on a crumb, in her eagerness to talk; ''an' it wouldn't make Uncle laugh inside his stummick, when we ask questions, till his shoulders jiggle!'' she wound up triumphantly.

''Here they come now,'' cried Rob, as the first heavy clap of thunder rolled across the sky, and at the same moment Aunty and Uncle entered the room with the twins.

''Aunty,'' cried Caroline, plunging straight at the heart of the subject, ''there's a secrut,

an' we know there is, so you needn't puttend. Rob says so, too. Won't you pul-ease tell us what it is?'' she coaxed.

''Do tell,'' joined in Elizabeth, seating herself upon Uncle's knee.

''When is a secret like a church-bell?'' laughed Uncle teasingly.

''When it is tolled, of course,'' answered Rob promptly. ''That's easy!''

''And we don't want a secret like that,'' said Aunty, shaking her head at Uncle.

''So there is a secret, then,'' cried Rob quickly. ''Ah-ha! We thought so! And you're in it, too. Come, 'fess up!''

''We're all in it,'' teased Uncle, ''down to old Dane, and 'Merica,—most *especially* 'Merica!''

The children looked from one to another, completely mystified.

''Marsh in it, too?'' queried Caroline directly.

''Marshall is *It,*'' laughed Uncle, enjoying himself very much. ''He is the source and cause of *IT.*''

''Be careful!'' cautioned Aunty, shaking her head at him. ''Be careful! Little folks are good guessers, and only need a hint.''

A terrific crash of thunder stopped their

coaxing, and they all drew close together except Rob, who stood by the window, proud to be unafraid, and exclaiming loudly at the beauty of the lightning and the power of the wind, while the girls shrank close to the grown folks and openly admired his courage.

Suddenly he gave a cry, just as a crash of thunder pealed through the room.

"Oh, Uncle, the branch with the oriole's nest is down! I saw it go!"

Uncle sprang to his feet and rushed, bare-headed, out upon the porch. Rob followed at his heels, and the little girls forgot their terror enough to run to the windows.

Uncle soon found that he could do little in such a downpour, but he dragged the branch up on to the porch, and threw Rob's waterproof over it.

"A great many birds will be killed in this storm," he said, as he stood by the window with Rob a few minutes later, while the rain dashed wildly against the windows, and the trees bent low in the wind. "They fear nothing more than wind," he explained. "And they have reason to, for the trees are their homes and shelter. And also they cannot fly against such

a wind, especially when their feathers are wet. Probably you will find some little fellows in trouble after this is over. Ah! There goes the martin-house!'' he cried, as the pretty little building crashed to the ground. ''Are there any young in it now?''

''Yes,'' answered Rob, looking sorrowfully at the little wreck lying there in the raging storm. ''There was one brood in it.''

It was a terrific storm, but was over at last, leaving the yard strewn with small branches, twigs and ragged leaves. The children hurried into their waterproof clothes, eager to follow Uncle and see what damage had been done outside.

The nest was uninjured, but only one young bird was found alive. Uncle carried him to Marshall's room, where he hung the little nest, firmly fastened to the branch, in as natural a position as he could from the gas-fixture. A little later he found the mother-bird under some brush, where she had dragged herself, with one wing broken. After carefully setting her wing, he put her in the nest with the one remaining baby, but she continually tried to scramble out; and Uncle, fearing that she would injure her

wing, fastened a dark shawl over the nest, and then she settled quietly down for the night.

Then, with rubber boots well drawn up, the children, with Uncle leading, tramped gayly about the yard and garden.

Father Wren greeted them with a shrill burst of music from the top of his house, where he was busily dressing his feathers, as if nothing had happened. Plump Papa Bluebird looked quite unhappy about it all, curled up in a little wet ball under the eaves, near his bungalow. But when the children approached he shook a shower of silvery drops at them, and, with a cross, "Peep! Peep!" flew to a tree and began looking for his dinner, none the worse for the storm.

Cock-Robin and Madame, looking a little thinner after the hard spring work, hopped nimbly about the lawn, now and then feeding a fat, speckled-vested baby, almost as big as his parents, who was making a glutton of himself over the worms the storm had brought forth. Madam Nuthatch looked out from her front door quite undisturbed by the weather, her little family now big enough to take care of themselves.

But the Martin family had not fared so well.

The children found two young ones in the garden, quite feathered out, having been almost ready to leave the nest, but now nearly drowned, their feathers plastered to their small bodies. The children put them in a box filled with pieces of soft flannel, and left them near the stove in the kitchen. In a remarkably short time they were dry and lively.

Rob and Elizabeth hunted the entire neighborhood over for injured birds, and finally succeeded in finding a baby blue jay, who had fallen from his nest, quite unhurt, but squawling loudly for his mamma. Uncle bade them carry him back and watch for the parent-birds, guarding him until they came. He made such a racket that they had not long to wait until the mother came and coaxed him under a bush.

"Well, Marshall," said Uncle, when they had gathered in his room that evening, "you will have your hands full to get all these youngsters able to fly and take care of themselves, before,"—

"Sh! Sh! Sh!" cried Mamma, and Uncle clapped his hands over his mouth, amidst the shouts of the children.

"You'll have to sew your mouth up yet,"

advised Marshall; and the children immediately began their teasing where they had left off, but discovered nothing.

"You're a sham, Uncle!" cried Elizabeth, at last. "I believe you just pretend to almost let out the secret. You'd be the last one to tell it."

"Have patience," laughed Marshall. " 'Twill only be a secret a little longer!"

"Oh, you can talk!" cried Rob impatiently, tossing a pillow at his brother, with whom he now dared to take such liberties. "You know all about it."

"Perhaps," suggested Uncle, drawing a long face, "we are going to send you all to a summer school. How would you like that?"

"O—O—O—" they all groaned in a chorus. "O—"

"You wouldn't, would you?" pleaded Caroline in her sweetest voice.

"Oh, gee!" groaned Rob.

"I should think you would all know better than that," laughed Marshall, remembering the books taken out of his hands on several occasions by Uncle. "He'd be more likely to take you out of school in the winter, than to put you in in summer," he declared confidently.

The next day was a busy one. The oriole had to be put in a cage, for she was very wild. Uncle hung the nest, with the lonely baby in it, out in the elm tree, as nearly as possible where the little mother had built it. Soon the male oriole, gorgeous in his freshly washed suit of black and orange, appeared, and flew cautiously about, giving anxious cries at short intervals. Suddenly approaching the nest, and as suddenly darting away again, as if some frightful ogre, instead of his own unhappy little son, looked out at him. Before noon, however, the children saw him bring to the crying baby a fine fat bug, and then Uncle felt satisfied that he would take care of the little unmothered one until it could care for itself, which would not be long. As they watched him flying back and forth, his brilliant orange feathers flashing in the sun, Uncle pointed out to them the difference in his coloring and that of the female, who is far duller and less noticeable.

"Her pretty colors are all mixed up with black and gray, until she's only olive-brown," Elizabeth said.

"Another case of 'protective coloration' in the little woods people," said Uncle. "You'd

better learn those words, little folks. They aren't so hard."

"It seems to me," remarked Rob, "that the 'little wood people,' as you call them, spend most of their lives trying to escape from enemies."

"That is very true," said Uncle. "Yet they do seem to find lots of chance to sing, and frolic in the sunshine, as if bent upon nothing but pleasure. Among their enemies I believe that, until lately, man was the one they dreaded most, and with good reason. But, thanks to some good men, their lives are easier now."

All the morning the children were kept busy trotting about, providing food for the two little martins, the oriole, and the little kinglet, who was still with them. Rob and Uncle went to work at once repairing the "martin flats," the parent-birds continually flying about the bare pole and their heads, calling piteously for their little ones. In less than an hour after the house was back in its old place, the parents were feeding the little birds as if nothing had happened.

The first of July, a week after the storm, the children gathered in Marshall's room at five o'clock in the afternoon. To their surprise,

their parents and Aunty and Uncle were there before them.

"What's up?" cried Rob, suspecting something at once.

"You smell a mouse, eh," laughed Uncle, his eyes dancing with fun and pleasure. "Guess what's up."

"A picnic," cried Caroline, dancing up and down.

"A party," cried Elizabeth.

"Oh, better than that!" cried Uncle. "Much better!"

"Better than twenty,—no, thirty; yes, thirty picnics," cried Marshall, his pale face now flushed with pleasure and excitement. And he winked wisely at Uncle.

"What *could* be that?" said Elizabeth scornfully. "You couldn't have such a thing all at once!" And the grown folks laughed merrily.

"It is, though!" cried Marshall. "It really *is more than thirty picnics!*"

The children, completely puzzled, looked from one to another, seeking the answer; then at the smiling grown folks, as if expecting to read the secret in their laughing faces.

"It's a *camp!*" cried Marshall at last, fairly

shouting the words, in his eagerness to tell the wonderful news. *"In tents! In the woods!"* Then confusion reigned. Papa, with his hands over his ears, retreated to his study. Aunty ran laughing away to finish some packing. But Uncle remained, enjoying the excitement quite as much as the youngsters did.

Mamma, in her wisdom gained of years of experience with little folks, had refused to prepare for a six weeks' camp with six youngsters "helping" her. So the children had not been told anything until all preparations were nearly completed. Marshall alone was allowed the pleasure of anticipation.

Uncle and Papa, on their mysterious trips away, had pitched the tents in a beautiful little grove on the banks of a babbling trout-stream. They chose a place far away from any fashionable summer-resorts, in the northern part of the state. The camp now only awaited its occupants to be complete.

"But what about Marshall?" questioned the children, almost unable to believe in so much good fortune.

"It is chiefly for his benefit that we are going," explained Uncle. "You have all seen

how much fresh air has done for him, even here, so near the dirty city. Now we will give him a few weeks of pure air and pine-woods scents to breathe night and day, and soon you will see your brother strong and well again."

"What shall we do with all these birds?" was their next question.

"Uncle has arranged for all that, just as he has for everything else," laughed Marshall.

"You little folks will take care of the birds," answered Uncle. "We shall turn little King loose this fall, up in his native woods, where he will be better off than he is down here. I shall put him in a cage, and you youngsters must take care of him."

It was with happy hearts and radiant faces that the children trooped to bed that night, to dream of birds and beasts and tents and Indians.

PART II

LITTLE FOLKS CAMPING

CHAPTER XV

CAMP LIFE

"Leave the toiling and the stir of things,
The rush of hurrying feet,
And seek the downy meadows
With the violets scented sweet.

* * * * *

To where the wild is calling,
Calling to your heart to-day."

* * * * *

"He has a coat of cinnamon brown,
The brightest on his head and crown;
A very low-cut vest of white,
That shines like satin in the light;
And on his breast a hundred spots,
As if he wore a veil of dots."

When the children drove into camp a few days later, after a dusty railway journey and a five-mile drive, they found everything ready to receive them.

Night was coming on. The whip-poor-wills were calling in the shadowy forest, and the frogs were singing their night songs in the marshes. The children's eyes were heavy with drowsiness, but the glorious flag floating from the top of the

largest tent drew from them one rousing cheer. But they were too weary for further investigations that night. The row of snowy beds, daintily draped in white mosquito net, appealed to them more than anything else, and they quickly tumbled into them, where they lay for almost two minutes, listening to the strange wood-noises, before they drifted into dreamland.

The next morning they were early awakened by the joyous caroling of the birds. A wren, every feather aquiver with the joy of life, was filling the tent with his welcome, poured forth from a branch near the entrance. Not far away a song-sparrow thrilled them with his music. Far away in the woods the exquisite song of the wood-thrush called them more effectively than Mamma or 'Merica had ever done.

Scrambling into their clothes, the older children raced off through the woods, now here, now there, calling bits of news to one another, whistling and shouting, till the squirrels scampered to the tip-top of the trees and stayed there. And the birds hid themselves and peeped out in a fright from their hiding-places, little dreaming what good friends of theirs these noisy intruders were.

Before breakfast they had explored the greater part of "their woods" as they called the pretty little grove in which their camp was pitched.

The great forest trees stood as they had stood when the Indians roamed among them. Only the undergrowth had been cut away, and in many places grass grew beneath the trees, while in others a thick mat of dead leaves or pine-needles carpeted the ground. Birds flew about, or scuttled under the bushes or dead leaves, and many of them, never having been disturbed by man, showed little fear of our friends.

"Whoo—oo—ooo—oo!" Mamma's familiar call echoed through the woods at seven o'clock, answered by calls and whistles in all directions, and turned the children's foot-steps back toward camp and breakfast.

"Oh, Uncle, we counted ten kinds of birds between five o'clock and seven!" cried Elizabeth, hanging on his arm as they answered the call.

"And you would have seen more, perhaps, if you hadn't made such a racket," laughed Uncle.

"Yes," said Rob, joining them in time to hear his sister's remark, "but that included sparrows, Buff."

"Can you name and describe them?" asked Uncle, turning to Elizabeth, as he seated himself at the table, and ignoring Rob's scornful remark.

"Some of them," she answered. "We saw a cedar waxwing. He has a nest over there, not far from our tent," she continued, half rising, and waving her cup about, baptizing Rob with her "cambric tea." "He is a sort of a greenish brown all over his back and wings, except for some little red spots on his wings that look like little red drops of blood. There is a king-bird's nest in that big cedar tree over there, too," leaning far back on two legs of her chair, to point with her teaspoon, and dripping tea down the back of Uncle's neck in her excitement.

"Dear, dear, where are your manners?" gasped Mamma under her breath, while Uncle gave her a satisfied smile.

"And, oh, Uncle, the little baby kings," she continued,—

"Princes," corrected Aunty, laughing. "Be careful, Buffy; you'll turn over the table!"

"Princes, then," Elizabeth corrected herself, bringing her chair down on four legs.

"They look like their papa already, at least one did. He was on the edge of the nest, and he was black, and had a white band on the end of his tail already. I couldn't see any red spot on his head. But the little one had a teenty, tinty crest. We saw a yellow warbler, a wood-thrush, and a scarlet tanager," she continued, growing breathless in her eagerness to tell. "That's five,"—

"I can tell about the *tanger,*" cried Caroline, pounding the table with the handle of her knife, to gain attention. "He's all red 'cept his coat-sleeves and tail, an' they're black!"

"Brief, but correct," laughed Uncle.

"The yellow bird was yellow," piped up James having satisfied a ravenous appetite enough to admit of conversation.

"But the wood-thrush," said Elizabeth, with a dreamy look in her pretty brown eyes. "It was singing so sweetly! I never heard anything so lovely!"

"You must hear the other thrushes," cried Uncle, always enthusiastic about these beautiful singers, his favorite birds. "Some think the veery, or Wilson's thrush, the finest singer. Others prefer the song of the hermit. They are

all so beautiful, it is hard to compare them. I prefer to enjoy each one as I hear it. Perhaps one's choice depends upon the humor one is in."

"There is something about them," Elizabeth continued diffidently, "that makes you sort of want to be good. I should think if a wicked man should hear one just as he started to do some wicked thing, that—that he would stop, just as if, as if—" and she dropped her eyes shyly—"he heard his mother's voice, or—or even God's, telling him not to."

There was silence for a moment, and then Uncle said: "Yes, there is a certain charm about their music that seems to bring pure thoughts and high desires. You must learn to know the thrushes by sight as well as by their song."

"All thrushes look alike to me," laughed Rob, parodying a familiar street-song.

"Yes," agreed Uncle, "I suppose they do. We might carelessly describe the four varieties as brown with a tinge of green above, and whitish below, marked with black. They are different, however, as you will see. The black spots upon the wood-thrush are more nearly round than the others, and are on the sides as well as

on the breast and belly. The veery is the least plainly marked of them all, and is the brightest in color. The hermit's spots are arrow-shaped and run together like a chain. The olive-backed is much like the hermit's but we find no difference in the coloring of his back and tail. The hermit's back is olive and his tail is a decided brown. There, can you remember all that? Not right away, I think, but little by little you will learn to know them apart."

The children shook their heads doubtfully, and Rob said, "I'm glad I don't have to know their spots to hear 'em sing."

"That was five," continued Elizabeth, beginning again where she had been interrupted, for Elizabeth could never be turned aside from her purpose. "Then there was a wren and a song-sparrow. And by the river we saw a big blue-and-gray bird with a big crest, sitting on a branch that hung out."

"A kingfisher," said Uncle.

"Oh, was it? Oh, how I wish that I had seen it better!"

"And that's six," cried Caroline, counting on her fingers.

"And then," said Rob, bound to tease, "you

forget the sparrows, dozens of 'em, and the crow without any tail in the corn-field."

"Well, they count, don't they?" Elizabeth appealed to her uncle.

"Indeed, they do," he said, smiling, and pushing his chair back from the table. "You'll see that they all count when we compare notes in the fall. And now all of you who wish may go with me for a long *quiet* walk, and see what we can learn about our new 'stamping-ground.' "

Each child sprang eagerly to his feet, Elizabeth in such a hurry that she turned over her chair with a bang. "Here! Here!" cried Papa. "Don't turn over the big tent, Elizabeth. You've turned over about everything else this morning." But Elizabeth was too happy to be offended, and raced off with the rest to prepare for the walk.

Papa had bought Marshall a wheel-chair, though the boy could now walk short distances and was gaining every day. But in his chair he could join the children on this exploring tramp, using it in the road-way, and taking short walks afoot in the woods.

They followed a winding road at first, that led them past meadows of promise, and through tempting looking groves full of birds. And often, by doubtful-looking bridges, they crossed the tiny stream, by courtesy called a river.

Marshall had not joined them in their suburban tramps at home, and now his pale cheeks glowed with pleasure at taking part in the fun instead of waiting at home to hear about it second-hand.

Uncle pulled away the reeds and unripe cat-tails as they skirted the marsh, showing them a red-winged blackbird's nest, and the tiny globular home of a marsh wren, each gentle breeze giving the babies a swing as it passed. And, wading in among the rushes, the children were astonished to see the number of tiny marsh-wrens that flew up in a fright when disturbed.

With the aid of his field-glass, Marshall himself discovered a hawk's nest, high up in a pine tree, some distance away.

The cries of a baby bird in the grass by the roadside next drew their attention. Drawing slowly near, they saw a large bird alight in front

of another one, not much smaller than himself, but evidently an infant. The parent bird was very handsome, with wings, back, and tail of various shades of brown. A red spot glowed on his crown, and the beautiful golden lining of his wings showed as he stood erect to feed the baby. The snowy patch on his back proclaimed him a flicker.

"Why, I should think that baby was big enough to feed himself," cried Elizabeth.

But the father-bird evidently did not think so, for he pushed his beak far down the little one's throat, and then, with a peculiar retching motion, discharged the food from his own into the baby's mouth, much to the girls' disgust.

"That is a well-known bird in America," said Uncle, "but he has so many names that it is sometimes confusing. Some say that he is called by as many as thirty different names; among them the most common are 'high-holer' or 'holder,' 'yellow hammer,' and 'golden-winged woodpecker.' There is a little poem about him that I wish you to learn, as it will teach you much about him." And as they wandered along the pleasant country road, he repeated to them "The Flicker's Letter."

"People:
"Tell me where you scare up
Names for me like 'flicker,' 'yarup,'
'High-hole,' 'yucker,' 'yellow hammer.'
None of these are in my grammar,—
'Pique bois jaune,'—woodpecker yellow,—
So the Creoles name a fellow.
Others call me 'golden wings,'
'Clape,' and twenty other things
That I never half remember
Any summer till September.

"Many names and frequent mention,
Show that I receive attention,
And the honor that is due me;
But if you would interview me
Call me any name you please.
I'm at home among the trees,
Yet I never cease my labors
To receive my earnest neighbors.
And 'twill be your best enjoyment
Just to view me at employment.

* * * *

"I'm the friend of every sower,
Useful to the orchard-grower,
Helping many a plant and tree
From its enemies to free,—
They are always food for me.
"And I like dessert in reason,
Just a bit of fruit in season;
But my *delicacy is ants,*
Stump or hill inhabitants;
Thrusting in my sticky tongue,
So I take them, old or young.

* * * *

"Surely we have found the best
Place wherein to make our nest;
Tunnel bored within a tree,
Smooth and clean as it can be,
Smallest at the door,
Curving wider toward the floor.
Every year we make a new one,
Freshly bore another true one;
Other birds, you understand,
Use our old ones second-hand,—
Occupying free of rent,
They are very well content.

"To my wife I quite defer,
I am most polite to her,
Bowing while I say, 'Ker-cher!'
Eggs we number five to nine,
Pearly white with finish fine.
On our nest we sit by turns,
So each one a living earns;
Though I think I sit the better,
When she wishes to, I let her

FLICKER."

The poem pleased the children, and while they were attempting to quote bits of it, Elizabeth slipped away from the others and wandered a little way back into the woods, eager to make some interesting discovery herself. She soon returned with sparkling eyes, and in her hands a nest, which plainly showed the wear and tear of several seasons.

"It's an old one!" she explained breathlessly, as soon as she came within hearing of the little group. "And it's so funny! I'm quite sure it's an old one, Uncle, or I wouldn't have taken it."

"Yes," agreed Uncle, taking the nest in his hands, "you have found a remarkable nest. It was built by a yellow warbler. Do you see, over there in that pasture, those birds following the cows? Yes? Take your glasses and you will see one or two birds taking a free ride on the cows' backs."

"Why, Uncle," exclaimed Elizabeth, "surely they didn't make this little nest! They are so big!"

"Is the birds tired, Uncle? Is that why they ride on the cows' backs?" asked James.

When the laughter and teasing of the elder brothers had ceased, Uncle explained. "No, dear," he said, "the birds are picking the insects off the cows' backs. Will you describe the birds, Rob?"

"Why, they're not much to describe," said Rob, glancing at them somewhat carelessly. "They're just large, dark-colored birds, black, I believe."

"Is that all you girls see?" asked Uncle, turning to them.

Elizabeth studied the birds carefully with her glass for a moment, then answered slowly and exactly: "They have brown heads and necks, and black wings and bodies and tails. They look something like blackbirds."

"They belong to the blackbird family," said Uncle, pleased with her accurate description, "but they get their names from their habit of following the cows, and are called cowbirds. They seem to be quite a relief to the cows, but we should be glad to be rid of them all, for they are a great nuisance. They never choose mates, as other birds do, build nests, and raise a family. Instead of that, the female slips around, watching her chance to lay her eggs in smaller birds' nests. When the little cowbird is hatched, he is larger and stronger than his little foster brothers, and he either gets the lion's share of the food, and the other babies in the nest starve, or else, in his frantic efforts to get the food which the little foster mother is trying to feed to the others, he crushes the life out of the smaller birds. The little yellow warbler is the only bird we know of, that is

wise enough to outwit the cowbird. When the cowbird chooses the warbler's nest, as she frequently does, for her orphan asylum, little Mrs. Warbler sometimes, as in this case, weaves a top over the nest, thus enclosing the cowbird's egg, and sometimes some of her own as well, and leaves them to spoil. Then she patiently proceeds to lay more eggs in the top compartment. Sometimes, as you see has been done here, the cowbird returns and again lays an egg, this time in the second story of the nest. And the little warbler, if not discouraged, repeats her little trick.

"In this case, which is very unusual, you may see the cowbird returned three times, and until the nest reached its fourth story the mother warbler was unable to raise her little family in peace. And it may be that, even after all her trouble, she raised a little cowbird nuisance instead of her own pretty babies." While he was speaking, with his knife he cut a small opening in the side of the nest, through which the children could see the discarded eggs.

As they were returning home, James and Sherburne, running ahead, discovered not far from their camp, a little nest, built low in a

bush. They were much excited over their discovery, and came racing back to call Uncle quickly to the spot. The nest was built so low that they could see the tiny mottled eggs without even standing on tiptoe.

"It is a field-sparrow's nest," said Uncle, when he had seen it. "I am glad it is so near home, for we can soon be watching the parents feed the babies, and later see them teaching the little ones to fly."

The twins were so delighted, and felt so important over their discovery, that they raced home ahead of the others, almost bursting with eagerness to pour the wonderful news into the ears of sympathetic mammas.

Uncle said that this nest was to be their very own charge, and they were to report to him daily all that happened in and about it.

When they reached the camp, after their long walk, they found America frying the trout which Papa had taken from the stream only a few hours before. The long table of pine boards, covered with a snowy oilcloth, stood under the trees, a great bunch of field-lilies and ferns, which Mamma and Aunty had found time to gather, at each end.

"I'm hungry!" announced Marshall, sniffing the breeze, as the smell of the sizzling trout met his nostrils.

"I am, too!" cried Rob, as he pushed Marshall's chair up to the table.

"Such a condition is chronic with you," laughed Uncle to Rob, but he exchanged a satisfied and very tender smile with Mamma, as Marshall began eating his trout with quite the appetite of a normal, hungry boy.

CHAPTER XVI

A VISIT TO THE LAKE

"Across the lonely beach we flit,
One little sandpiper and I.
As fast I gather bit by bit,
The scattered drift-wood, bleached and dry.
The wild wind raves,
The tide runs high,
As up and down the beach we flit,
One little sandpiper and I."

A FEW days after their arrival at camp, the children tramped over to the lake for a bath, Uncle and Aunty accompanying them. Aunty was there to look after the twins, and Uncle for the sake of a bath in the cool, clear water, and, perhaps, partly for the romp he knew he would have with the youngsters.

The lake was only half a mile away from the camp, and they had it all to themselves, for none of the neighboring farm folk ever came there to bathe.

The children shouted when, coming out from a tangle of berry-bushes and wild-grape vines,

they unexpectedly found themselves looking out upon a shining expanse of water, sparkling so quietly in the sunshine. A few gulls were skimming here and there, their snowy breasts touching the water now and then in a light caress as they dipped and darted about. A kingfisher flew sullenly away from his watch-tower, a half-hidden snag near the shore, sounding his noisy, rattling call as he went, plainly disgusted with these unusual visitors who were spoiling his plans.

How much fun it all suggested to these happy children. They couldn't get into the water too quickly. Amid much noisy laughter and chatter, the merry crowd soon rigged up two small dressing-tents out of umbrellas and shawls, and, in a shorter time than they ever undressed in at night, they were splashing about in the clear, cool water.

The bed of the lake was soft sand, and the older children could swim out for a hundred yards before getting beyond their depth. The twins were content to splatter about near the shore, their plump bodies, scantily covered by their short bathing-suits, shining like marble in the sunshine.

"Too white! Too white!" cried Uncle, dashing the water over their dimpled shoulders. "I'll make these little bodies brown as the sand before we go home in the fall."

"Hi! Uncle!" Rob's voice interrupted, from far out in the lake, as he stopped short in an effort to "duck" Elizabeth, who had followed at his heels, and pointed to a gull that flashed past him, almost brushing his sleek, wet pate with her wings. "Hey, Uncle, what was that bird with those dandy white wings? Gee! But they're pretty!"

"A herring gull," answered Uncle promptly. "And those 'dandy white wings' make the poor bird a great deal of trouble. It is for those very wings, which ladies use for hat trimmings," —and, oh, the scorn he put into the words,— "that a great number of gulls are killed. Notice their graceful flight. There are not many of them on these small lakes," he continued, swimming out to a more comfortable speaking-distance, "but they are very numerous on Lake Michigan. However, you may find a few nests about here, among the rocks, or in those little tufts of grass across the lake there."

And, as Elizabeth turned to look in the direc-

tion in which he had pointed, she suddenly felt herself lifted bodily out of the water, and then ducked to the very bottom of the lake. She came up spluttering and gasping, but laughing good-naturedly. And as Rob shouted with delight at the joke on her, Uncle slipped up behind him, and before he had time to so much as grasp his nose, he too went under. Then how they did pounce upon Uncle, determined to throw him down. He soon led them back into shallow water, where the little ones joined them, and he had much ado to keep his footing against such determined little enemies. Breathless at last, they lay basking in the sun-warmed water, their bodies browning in the warm sunshine.

Up and down the beach wee sandpipers were running about, very little alarmed at these noisy visitors.

"It seems a pity to kill such wee, harmless little fellows, doesn't it?" said Uncle, calling the children's attention to them.

"What do they kill them for?" cried Elizabeth amazed.

"To eat, of course, silly," said Rob importantly.

"Why, I'd 'most as soon eat a baby," cried

Caroline; "they're so little and so cunning!"

"That little fellow is the spotted sandpiper," said Uncle, pointing to a plump little bird, stepping daintily along the sand, his "white vest" thickly marked with round black spots. "In the winter," continued Uncle, "you wouldn't know him, for he changes his vest for one of pure white."

"Is he the one that the poem, 'The Sandpiper,' is written about?" asked Elizabeth, proud to air her knowledge, especially so soon after Rob's saucy answer to her a moment before.

"Yes," answered Uncle. "Perhaps you can recite it for them."

And while she was reciting the well-known poem by Celia Thaxter, with considerable help from Aunty, the twins waded out of the water, and trotted up the beach, bent upon some little business of their own. After going some distance, they evidently discovered that their chubby feet were plastered with sand, for, seating themselves upon some little hillocks of grass, each took a plump foot in his hand, and, after seriously looking it over, proceeded to

scrub it vigorously with tufts of grass. Satisfied at last with the condition of their little pink toes, they rose to go.

But something was wrong with James! Turning and twisting, this way and that, plainly trying in every way he knew to see the seat of his small blue trunks, he called loudly for his twin, who had started to run along the beach ahead of him. At the call Sherburne came running back and began curiously turning his cousin about, and examining the ground where he had been sitting. Suddenly throwing himself down in an unhappy little heap upon the ground, James set up a wail that speedily brought Uncle and Aunty to the spot.

"What is the matter?" cried Aunty, quite breathless with running, and, sitting down upon the sand, she gathered her little nephew into her arms.

"Don't touch me!" cried the little fellow, wriggling away from her. "I can't be hugged! I'm all covered wif *scwambled eggs!* My new bavin' suit is all spoiled!"

"Scrambled eggs!" cried Aunty and Uncle in duet. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Somebody lefted their lunch," explained Sherburne gravely. "And Jimmie satted in it."

For a moment Aunty and Uncle stared at one another in questioning wonder; then Uncle turned the little body about, all dripping with yolks of eggs. Then, with a shout, he sat flat down upon the sand and roared, while the little ones stared gravely at him, James blinking away the tears.

"What is it?" asked Aunty, smiling faintly, not in the least understanding.

"He tried to help little Mother Sandpiper hatch her eggs, by sitting upon them," explained Uncle. And he showed her the bits of shell sticking to Jimmie's trunks. "And," still laughing, "he only succeeded in getting some spots." Then, taking the still sobbing child in his arms, he carried him back into the lake, where he quickly washed away all stains of the accident.

"Oh, did I kill all ve little baby birds?" cried Jimmie, as they came out of the water, his lip beginning to quiver again. "Won't ve muvver piper bird lay any babies at all?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Uncle comfortingly, as

they started back toward the other children. "There were no baby birds in the eggs yet, I think. So you didn't kill any. And Mother Sandpiper will most likely lay some more eggs and forget all about these. I think it will only make her a little more trouble. And perhaps she will choose a better place next time, where folks won't be likely to sit down upon them."

On the way home they followed the shore of the lake, and found it bordered by wild-strawberry vines, laden with small, sweet berries. The boys filled their big straw hats, and the girls lined their aprons with leaves and filled them with the fruit. And the stains on their lips told that many went home in their stomachs.

Rob ran eagerly ahead of the others, who wandered lazily along, eating and picking. When about half-way home his whistle was heard, and his eager, excited voice calling, "Hi! Uncle, come here and see what I've got!"

They all flocked toward him, but he motioned them back, grinning mischievously, and saying importantly, pretending great consideration for their feelings, "You folks that are afraid of snakes had better stay back!" And Aunty and

Elizabeth did not wait to hear any more about the snake, but almost fell over each other in their hurry to leave the spot.

"This is a dandy!" shouted Rob, as Uncle drew near, the little ones very curious, but a little timid, following at his heels.

"He was gettin' his dinner," continued Rob. "But I've fixed him! He's a whale!"

Sure enough, at Rob's feet lay a large black snake, fully five feet long. In his jaws he still clutched a frog, only its hind-legs sticking out, while Rob pinned him down with a forked stick held firmly across his back, just below the head.

"I'm chokin' it out of him," cried Rob, as the snake wriggled and doubled about. "Pull it out, Uncle. Pull the frog out!"

"Oh, don't let him eat the poor little frog," cried Caroline, dancing wildly about under Uncle's feet. "Kill it! Kill it!"

"Kill the horrid old snake," echoed the twins.

"I'm afraid the frog's too far gone to save," said Uncle, catching hold of the long legs and pulling it out, very much squashed indeed. "But you hang on to the snake till I get a stick and then you can kill it."

The stick was quickly brought, and when

Uncle and Rob joined the others, Rob proudly trailed the long black snake behind him, taking it home "to show to Marshall."

"I wonder if birds think they are safe from snakes in blackberry-bushes," said Elizabeth, as they noticed one flying in and out, as if it might have young in there.

"On the contrary," answered Uncle, "black snakes also like just such places, especially blackberry-bushes, for they like the berries. And they also like young birds to eat. So it cannot be very safe for the birds, but very convenient for the snakes."

"Maybe Nature is looking out for the snakes a little bit, too," suggested Rob. "They have to live, too."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Elizabeth, her tone expressing no sympathy for the snake. "They don't need any one to take care of 'em. They're not worth taking care of, anyway."

"What are those rogues up to over there?" exclaimed Uncle, tossing a berry toward the twins, who were eagerly discussing some question behind a big tree.

"Dunno," said Rob indifferently. "Mischief, I reckon. Looks like it."

"What language!" reproved Elizabeth, tossing her head.

"Don't tell Uncle," they heard Sherburne say, as they drew near. "Pl-ease don't, Jimmie," he pleaded. "We'll find it and keep it, an' you can have half."

"Fitch half?" questioned James doubtfully.

"We-ell the head half, maybe, if you won't tell," very reluctantly.

"Oh, I'll tell you," cried James, with a new idea, "we'll 'vide her sideways. Ven we'll both have some head and tail too! But," doubtfully, "I don't b'lieve you heard one. An' 'sides Uncle says vey eat birds."

"My Bluebell didn't," argued Sherburne. "I never did once saw her!" he declared, his words getting much tangled up. "She ated milk every time, she did!"

His words were interrupted by a long-drawn-out "Mi-a-ou!"

"Why, Uncle," cried Elizabeth, "it's a cat! Away out here!"

"I'll shoot it," threatened Rob angrily, "if it comes about *our* woods."

"Where is it?" cried Sherburne. "I can't see it anywhere."

"In ve bushes, I guess," said James, coming forth from behind the tree, closely followed by Sherburne. "Sherburne heard it by-fore."

"It is! It is!" cried Sherburne, delighted, for he dearly loved a cat. "Oh, can we keep it, Uncle?"

"*May-can-may* we keep it?" pleaded Caroline, pulling Uncle's coat-tails vigorously, to get his attention.

"If you can find a cat, you 'may-can-may' keep it," mimicked Uncle, laughing.

"Oh, goody! goody! It's in dese bushes," cried Sherburne, beginning to pull away the trailing, thorny branches, not heeding the pricks he got.

"I'll kill the old thing!" threatened Rob again. "Why, Uncle, it'll kill all our birds. Don't you know it will?"

"This one won't kill birds," laughed Uncle.

"No! No!" cried Sherburne triumphantly, his face brightening. "Ours won't, will it, Uncle? Ours won't be trained to eat birds, will it?" and he pushed himself bravely in among the thorns.

At the first rustle of the bushes near him, up flew a trim, long-tailed, slate-colored bird, with

a velvety black crown, or cap, the children called it.

"Wait a moment," said Uncle to the little ones. "Be quiet. Don't frighten that bird. Watch him."

The bird did not fly far away, but perched upon a stump in the hedge, dressed his feathers a little, and then burst into song, seeming to mark time by a peculiar, jerking motion of his tail.

"How pretty!" cried the girls and Aunty in a chorus.

"Oh, come on," pleaded impatient Sherburne. "Come, help me hunt my kitty."

"Sh! Sh! Wait," cautioned Uncle again.

The bird tossed his head, flipped his tail a time or two, and then began a low, sweet warble, quite different from the first song. The children were delighted. But the bird had not yet finished "showing off," for he really seemed to be doing so. No; he flew down to the ground, helped himself daintily to a little luncheon, flew back to the post, and then standing there, so smooth and glossy, "just like a little gentleman," as Elizabeth said, he deliberately and distinctly sang the robins' even-song!

The children could scarcely refrain from clapping their hands with pleasure at the pretty little surprise, but Uncle shook his finger sternly at them, lest they frighten the bird.

"I know what it is," whispered Elizabeth, at Uncle's side. "It's a 'mawkin'-bird.' I've heard Mec tell about 'em lots of times!" And all unconsciously she imitated the old mammy's pronunciation. "But I didn't know they came away up here."

"No," said Uncle, "this isn't a mocking-bird, but his near cousin, and a fine mimic, though not so good as the mocker." Even as he spoke, the bird changed its song to the shrill "Chirp! Chirp!" of the sparrow. Then in a twinkling his tail drooped, his head slumped down between his shoulders, his feathers in some mysterious way became sadly ruffled, and, with the most forlorn, uncared-for appearance, he drawled out, "Mi-a-ou! Mi-a-ou! Mi-a-ou!"

Then, amidst the shouts of laughter and hearty applause of the children, he flew swiftly away.

"There's your kitten, Sherburne," said Rob, bound to tease. "How d'you like him?"

"That's a bird," cried Sherburne, scarcely

able to keep back the tears, though he tried bravely. "It wasn't my kitty a-tall! He's a mean old bird to try to fool me." For he still thought there was a kitten somewhere about. "It was all the kitty there was, sonny," said Uncle, patting the flushed cheeks kindly. "It was a catbird. Come," he exclaimed, noticing the quivering lip and shining eyes, "let us hunt for his nest. It may be about here somewhere."

It was some time before they found it, hidden deep in a tangle of prickly bushes. And when they did find it, the children pronounced it "not pretty at all," as it was so loosely and carelessly woven. But in it were three baby catbirds, or "kitten birds," as Caroline called them, all loudly crying for food whenever the bush was disturbed near their nest.

Uncle hid the children near by, hoping to see the mother-bird feed them. After a quarter of an hour of cramped waiting, the father-bird, whom they had seen cautiously approaching the nest, warily, as if uneasy, finally fed the little ones so hastily that Elizabeth wondered that he did not choke them. And though they watched for more than half an hour, they had not a

glimpse of the mother-bird. But the male returned again and again to feed them.

"They must be half-orphans," said Uncle at last, rising to go. "Probably the little mother has been killed, and the poor father is raising them alone, or else they are quite orphans and this bird has adopted them. Catbirds seldom let little orphaned catbirds die, but will care for them as if they were their own. Perhaps you can help feed them, Sherburne, if you're very, very careful. At any rate, you may call them yours," he added, trying to comfort the child, for his disappointment was sore. "And you must come often to see that nothing happens to them."

Thus comforted, Sherburne trudged happily home with the rest, all rosy and hungry, and ready for a hearty supper.

CHAPTER XVII

SHERBURNE'S PET

"Blue cedar-berries bid you come,
And brambles have gathered work,
For tiny bills to twine and pull."

AUGUSTA LARNED.

THE warm summer days sped quickly by. Each morning the twins went, the first thing, to the little sparrow's nest, and proudly made their report to Uncle. In three days four little birds had pecked their way out of the shells, and the little parents highly entertained the children with their devoted care of their babies.

"O dear," sighed Elizabeth one day, when they were trying to crowd several happy little expeditions into one brief week, "I know there aren't so many days between Saturday and Monday now, as there were when we were in school." She looked very comfortable lying there in a hammock, her toe just touching the ground and helping a gentle swing now and then. They called this pretty spot between the two

tents the drawing-room, and had hung several hammocks there, and scattered to the best advantage their two or three easy-chairs. Here the family gathered as they had in the big living-room at home.

"Where are we going for our walk to-morrow, Uncle?" Elizabeth asked, as that gentleman joined their group, holding an ominous slip of yellow paper in his hand.

"If you walk with me," laughed he, "it will be upon the hot and dusty streets of M——. I have a telegram calling me there for a day or so."

"That's too bad, in this hot weather," sympathized Papa; "and the trout biting so well, too!"

The children groaned over the news, but there were so many things to do in this enchanted land that they soon ceased their lamentations. Marshall really missed his uncle more than any of the others, for he depended so much upon him for his amusement. Uncle gave him very little time in which to worry over his ill-health.

He lay in his hammock the next day, eagerly watching any little feathered adventurer that came near, hoping that he might learn some-

thing of real value to tell his uncle upon his return. But the birds were utterly commonplace. They seemed to have no original inspirations to-day, and Marshall sympathized with them, for it was a hot and uninspiring day.

Mamma and Aunty were lying down, the children had wandered away from camp, and Marshall, receiving no encouragement from the birds, soon laid down his pencil and composed himself for a nap. His hammock swung gently back and forth, and just as he was drifting into that delightful semi-conscious state, between sleeping and waking, Sherburne rushed into the "drawing-room," rousing him with a start.

"See what I've found!" cried the child, his cheeks very red, and his eyes very bright with excitement. "Tell us what it is, Marsh"; and he laid a little half-dead baby bird in Marshall's hand. Its little heart throbbed so violently that it seemed about to burst through the tender, half-naked skin. Its mouth was wide-open, its breath coming in gasps, and its bright black eyes were wild with fear.

"Poor little fellow!" pitied Marshall. "I wonder what it is. It hasn't enough clothes

on, Sherburne, to tell." And he laid the little bird against his warm cheek.

Aunty, hearing the excited voices, came out of her tent, and they appealed to her for information. Very tenderly she took the little creature in one hand, covering it with the other, softly, as its brooding mother might have pressed her breast against it, and in a moment it became quiet.

"It knows you love it, Mamma," whispered little Sherburne. "It knows you wouldn't hurt it."

"If only Uncle were here," complained the children, "he'd know what it is."

"I believe it is thirsty," suggested Aunty, and, dipping her finger into a cup of water, she allowed a drop to fall into the wide-spread mouth. My! what a fuss the little fellow made! He sputtered and choked, and did everything but sneeze, the children said. Aunty looked on in dismay at his convulsive attempts to swallow, and after a time he disposed of the drop in some way.

"We must feed him," now suggested Mamma, who had joined them, for she knew how comfort-

ing it is to the young of the human race, when in trouble, to be filled up.

"*You* may," said Aunty very decidedly, and gave the bird into her hands.

So the children brought corn-meal mixed with water, and laid a little in the bird's mouth; but after much sputtering and tossing of his little head, he threw this also out of his mouth.

"He must want worms," said Rob, and hurried off to get some. A plump little green worm, laid in his beak, was rejected in the same emphatic way, and the children were in despair.

Then Aunty suggested that perhaps the little fellow was not hungry, and should be put in a safe place and left alone for a while. This advice was followed, and plainly suited the bird, for all the rest of the day he squatted upon the floor of the cage where they had put him. Not a mouthful did he swallow, though the children made several more attempts to feed him, and Sherburne hovered near him constantly.

"You'll have to turn him loose when Uncle comes," said Caroline, a wee bit jealous because Sherburne claimed the bird. "He won't let you keep him."

"He hasn't any muvver," argued Sherburne,

his lip beginning to quiver, for he loved the helpless little thing. "Leastways I couldn't find her. So I don't see why I can't keep him. He would die wifout some one to take care of him. Guess my mamma knows how to care of a bird!" In all his short four years of life Sherburne had never wanted anything as he wanted this little pet.

"Uncle says it's cruel to keep 'em in a cage," argued Caroline.

"Oh, but I sha'n't," cried Sherburne eagerly; "only till he gets tame. Then I'll let him fly round ever'where, and jus' sleep in his cage nights, like Uncle did wif the little sparrow."

But Caroline shook her head dubiously, and just then a shout from Marshall interrupted their conversation.

"I've got it!" he cried. "Here's all about him! I'll bet it's a cedar-bird,—a waxwing,—and belongs to that bunch in the tree over there. This book says the old birds feed 'em by re-gur-gi-ta-tion." Even Marshall had to take that long word a bit at a time. "That means she swallows the food first, and then pokes her bill into the little bird's mouth and spits up the food into it," he explained, not very elegantly,

we must admit, but clearly. Even Marshall's language seemed to testify to the happy fact that his health was daily improving.

"But I can't do *that!*" cried Sherburne, dismayed at the idea.

"No, of course not," said Marshall thoughtfully. "O dear! I wish that Uncle were here! This says they eat berries. You go hunt some, Jimmie."

He lay studying the book earnestly while the boys were gone, and when they returned, he said, "Now you watch me." Laying a berry in the bird's gaping mouth, he gave it a gentle push with his little finger, far down into the hungry little throat. It closed like a trap, and with a gulp the berry disappeared amidst shouts of delight from the children. They raced off to call Mamma and Aunty, who were much relieved to hear that the little creature need not starve to death. Indeed, after starving all day, it was now in danger of being stuffed to death by this fascinating method of feeding. However, it survived, and seemed none the worse.

The next morning Mamma awakened the children early, calling them to see the little

prisoner. There he sat, huddled up close to the bars of the cage his head pushed far through. On the outside the poor, anxious mother-bird clung to the bars of the cage, feeding her baby berries she had brought to him in her throat. How early she had come, or how many times she had been there, no one knew. They watched the pitiful little scene in silence, until the mother, having emptied her fruit-basket, flew away to her other little ones, where, a little later, they could see her feeding them.

Sherburne's eyes were shining now. What better care could his pet have than its own mother's? But when he turned to his mother for sympathy, he was astonished to see her eyes filled with tears.

"You must let him go, sonny," she said, laying her hand on the boy's head.

But Sherburne's expression was rebellious. "Let my bird go now?" he cried. "Why, its mamma is taking care of it. Why, muvver, she knows how!"

"Yes," said his mamma, "she can take care of it, perhaps. But it must be very hard for her to see her little one in prison, and be unable to get him out."

But the children all joined in begging to be allowed to keep the bird. So finally Aunty said that Sherburne might do exactly as he thought it was right to do, but she would insist that all of to-day he should watch the little mother-bird and the baby. Ah! wise Aunty!

Sherburne was overjoyed with this permission, and gladly hung about the cage all morning and far into the afternoon. After the mother's feeding, the little cedar-bird brightened up wonderfully. He hopped a step or two about the cage, and cried noisily for his mamma. After the second feeding he settled down comfortably for a nap. Hourly he seemed to become more desirable to Sherburne. Regularly the little mother came to feed him, and each time he seemed more lively. Toward night he began to try to force himself through the bars of the cage. The little mother, too, grew more restless, and flew around and around the gilded prison, trying in every way she knew to get in, even pulling at the bars of the cage, in a vain attempt to free her little one. Sherburne's face grew very grave as he watched her. At last night came, and birds and children settled down to rest.

But, for the first time in all his life, Sherburne could not go to sleep. He tried lying first on one side and then on the other, and on his stomach. But all in vain. He could not be comfortable. Every time he closed his eyes he saw his little prisoner, and the sad-eyed mother, struggling against the prison-bars. Once he sat up in bed, quite sure he heard the little cage rattle, as it did when the mother bird alighted upon it. After what seemed an endless time, kind nature came to his relief and the boy slept.

But by and by, instead of being in his cozy bed, he found himself in a hideous prison, not larger than his own little bedroom at home. Outside the bars stood a monster bird, which squawked at him and kept poking things into his mouth—nasty worms, and bugs, and horrid-tasting messes. He tried to force his way through the bars, but it was impossible.

Then the bird prison-keeper flew away, and his dear mother came. She fed him the things he liked, but she wept bitterly all the while. He tried to put his arms through the bars and around her dear neck, but the bars were too close together; and when she went away, he

beat his body against them and screamed wildly.

Aunty awoke at the first sound of the baby voice and flew to the side of her boy. When she reached his bedside she found him awake, but cowering under the covers, sobbing bitterly. She took him in her arms and questioned him, soothing him with mother hugs and kisses. He clung wildly to her, but soon became calmer. No, he was not sick, he said, when she questioned him. Yes, he had had a bad dream. Yes, he knew now it wasn't real. But, oh, it was real for somebody! he wailed afresh. And then he "guessed that he was hungry." But when she brought him milk and bread, he could not swallow for a lump that came in his throat; and when she looked away he hid the bread under his pillow. At last he lay still, and she slipped away, thinking he had only had a dream, and would sleep now.

A half-hour later, as she lay wondering about his fright, she heard the sound of footsteps outside the tent. Rising quickly, she softly pulled aside the tent-flap and peered out.

There in the moonlight a little white-clad figure was creeping softly toward the cedar-bird's



HE LIFTED THE DOOR OF THE CAGE. — *Page 247.*

cage. Looking cautiously about him, to make sure no one was watching, he lifted the door of the cage and fastened it securely, never dreaming that mother's eyes were on him, and mother's heart was singing a song of thanksgiving, for a boy with courage to do the right thing.

Softly the child slipped back to bed and a dreamless sleep.

He slept late the next morning, and was awakened by the children, who pounced upon him to tell him that some one had opened the door of the cage and freed his little pet. The children wondered about the mystery all morning, but Sherburne seemed strangely undisturbed, even uninterested.

When Uncle came they almost overwhelmed him with questions. He quite agreed with them that the little mother bird could not have opened the cage door.

Later, after a quiet talk with Aunty, he took Sherburne upon his knee, and, pointing to the cedar-bird parents, happily feeding their babies in the tree near-by, he said, "Aren't you glad that your little pet escaped?"

Sherburne's eyes dropped. "Yes, I am," he said, almost in a whisper.

"You will be more than glad, when I have told you what would have happened soon, if the little fellow had been kept a prisoner."

Sherburne looked up inquiringly.

"The unhappy little mother would have cared for her baby a little while," continued Uncle, impressively, "and then, when she had lost all hope of saving him, she would have fed her *own little son poison berries until she killed him!*"

Sherburne caught his breath. "Oh," he gasped. "Oh, Uncle, I am so glad I didn't know that before I dream—before I went to sleep!"

CHAPTER XVIII

ANNE

"Little words of kindness,
Little deeds of love,
Make this world an Eden,
Like the Heaven above."

THERE were neighbors near enough to supply the family with fresh milk, butter, eggs, and home-made bread. The trout-stream was a never-failing basis of supply, and some one was always glad to go fishing. Papa was an enthusiastic fisherman, and Uncle frequently tried his luck. The table was always well supplied with trout.

Through the children, largely, the family was rapidly becoming acquainted with the neighbors, and the friendliest relations were established. Our happy little party had readily fallen into the ways of camp-life, and now went about their duties quite as if at home.

Much of the time Marshall passed in his hammock, content to lie and drink in the life-giving sunshine and fresh air, and watch the birds in

the branches above his head. His hammock now hung where he could see the interesting cedar-bird family from where he lay.

"What a very attentive bird the waxwing is," he said one day to his Uncle, as he lay lazily watching the parent bird flying back and forth with food for the little ones.

"His nickname, or local name, is the 'polite bird,'" said Uncle. "I wish you could see a flock of them, sitting side by side upon a branch, smoothing each other's feathers, and twittering softly to one another. One will pick up some dainty titbit, and, instead of eating it, will pass it to his neighbor. He, in turn, will pass it on, and they continue this until, perhaps, it reaches the last bird in the row, before it is eaten. This is all the more singular, when we remember that in babyhood they are such gluttons. Our scientists have not yet satisfactorily explained this strange habit, though some think that the bird's throat is opened and shut by a valvular arrangement that refuses to open the throat so long as the bird's crop is full."

"I refuse to believe it," laughed Marshall. "It takes all the poetry away from what must be a very pretty little scene."

"Uncle! Uncle!" cried a frightened voice, rudely breaking in upon them. And Caroline came flying through the woods, her bobbed hair bouncing up and down as she leaped over a log, stumbled over a tent-pin, and finally fell plump into their startled midst.

"Oh, Uncle! Quick! Come quick! Come quick! He's awful sick!" And for once Rob, even, was too much frightened to tease her about the rime. "An' his papa's gone, an' his mamma,—an' Anne don't know what to do with him! He got all stiff an' blue, an'—an'—"

But Uncle was on his feet long before she reached this part of the story, had snatched up a small black case from the "stump desk," and started off in the direction from which Caroline had come.

"She's coming, Uncle," Caroline called after him, gasping for breath. "You needn't go. She's bringing him." But Uncle was gone.

A few rods away he met a pretty, fair-haired little girl, not much older than Elizabeth. She stumbled along, her breath coming in short sobs, and in her arms a heavy baby.

"Come with me," said Uncle shortly, not

stopping to explain, and, taking the silent baby into his own strong arms, he strode back toward camp. Relieved of her burden, the child easily kept up with Uncle's long, easy strides, one hand keeping hold of a wee baby foot. And relieved of the dreadful responsibility, she quickly regained her composure, though her face remained very pale.

"Oh, seh," she cried gratefully, "I reckon you are Caroline's uncle, and I'm so glad! I was all alone with Baby. Aunt 'Liza and Uncle 'Gene are gone to town." She paused for breath. Her voice was unusually musical, and she spoke in the soft southern tongue, losing all her *r's* in her excitement. "Then Caroline came," she continued; "she comes right often,—and we were playing with Baby, just the same as we always do. And we brought him oveh heah to the riveh. An' then, O deah! O deah! I reckon he had a spasm!" And the poor child wrung her hands as she recalled the terrible moment.

"Yes," said Uncle shortly, all doctor now, "he did. Here we are." And entering the tent by the back entrance, he laid the baby upon

his own bed, and deftly began undressing the little figure.

"Hot water, Edna," he commanded sternly. "Ice, Alice!" And while the ladies flew quickly about, obeying his orders, the children gathered in a frightened group, questioning Caroline, and eyeing the pretty little stranger, who hung tearfully over the baby, assuring the unconscious little fellow that she hadn't "*meant* to do anything to hu't him if she did."

And once Uncle paused in his work long enough to say sternly, "You had nothing to do with his illness, child!"

When it was all over, and Baby lying comfortably asleep on the bed, Mamma drew the little stranger to her, saying gently; "Now we have time for you. What is your name, my dear, and where do you live?"

"My name is Anne Leslie, and I came here from the south to live with my aunt. No, she isn't my aunt, really. But she's the only kin I have in the world." And her pretty lips quivered threateningly.

But Aunty patted her comfortingly on the shoulder, saying, "I knew you were a little

rebel. You see your tongue is ours, my deary,'' and purposely she drawled the words in good old Dixie style.

Anne smiled wanly and continued: ''They all went to town to-day an' left me alone with the baby. He wasn't very well yeste'day, but he was betteh this mo'nin'. They-all didn't think he was much sick, or I don't think they would have gone,'' she added in an apologetic manner. ''Caroline came oveh, and we took the baby oveh yondeh to the riveh. He'd been right whimsey all mo'nin', an' when we tried to make him throw rocks in the riveh he wouldn't do it or anything else. And then, all of a sudden, he jus' stiffened out in my lap, an' then,— an' then Caroline said, 'Bring him to Uncle'; an' I didn't stop fo' anything, I jus' came. An' I'm right obliged to you-all,'' and she looked gratefully from one to the other. She told her little tale in such a simple, straightforward manner, that it, with her pretty face and southern tongue, quite won their hearts.

''Well, well!'' said Mamma, when she had finished, tenderly smoothing the damp hair back from the child's white forehead, ''you just rest here until your aunt and uncle come, and we'll

take care of the baby. Try to play with the children a little now. I assure you, Baby is in good hands with our doctor."

All afternoon the two little strangers remained at the camp, Anne not playing much with the children, but watching over the sleeping baby in a tender, motherly way, very pretty to see.

"She knows lots about birds," said Caroline, later in the afternoon, anxious to show off her new friend to Uncle. " 'Most as much as you do, Uncle. Don't you, Anne?"

Anne's pale cheeks flushed rosy red. "Oh, Caroline," she cried, "I don't! You know I don't. Oh, seh, I nevah said so! Indeed, I didn't, seh!"

Her quaint way of addressing him as "sir," in the Southern fashion, pleased Uncle, for it reminded him of his own childhood, and the learned men he was taught to address as "sir." He smiled at her, and putting his arm about her, drew her to him.

"Do you love the birds, too?" he inquired kindly.

"Oh, yes, seh," she answered eagerly. "I do love 'em. But I don't know anything at all

about 'em sca'cely, 'cept what I've seen. Lots of 'em I don't even know the names of. Caroline says you know all about 'em all, though,'' and she glanced shyly up into his face.

Uncle smiled. ''I know most of them up here by name,'' he answered. ''You have been to school, I suppose?'' he questioned her cautiously, for he felt that there was something in the child worth bringing out, and he did not wish to frighten her.

''Yes, seh,'' she answered, ''some. Not since I came up heah, though. You see, I came late in February, and Uncle said it was too late to sta't in then, fo' this yea'. He says I'm about big enough to stop school, anyway''; and she sighed unconsciously, her big eyes slowly filling with tears.

''How did you happen to come here?'' Uncle continued, for, in his kindly way, he always wanted to know all about his friends.

''I haven't any fathe' or mothe','' was the pitiful answer. ''And when Grandfathe' died,'' her voice trembled dangerously, ''I didn' have anywhe's else to go. He used to talk to me about the bi'ds, but we didn't have any books. We had to sell them and he tried to teach me to

speak correctly''; and, as if remembering his lessons, she chose her words carefully. ''And I can use pretty correct English, when I remembeh,'' she said, as if proud of her old grandfather's teaching. ''But, oh, I do so want to go to school!'' And she clasped her hands together in her earnestness.

Behind Uncle's back irreverent Rob made a comical grimace at Elizabeth, expressing his astonishment and contempt of any such sentiment.

Uncle sat musing silently for some time, then, turning to Mamma, he said, and to the children it seemed entirely beside the question: ''That's a pretty big house you have in town, Edna. Quite full, I suppose all the time.''

Mamma smiled. ''O dear, no,'' she said laughingly. ''That house is made of India rubber and will stretch indefinitely.'' The children looked at one another much puzzled. Aunty smiled at her sewing.

''So you know lots about birds, do you?'' Uncle said, coming back to the subject and Anne.

Anne blushed painfully. ''No, seh,'' she explained again. ''Caroline said that.''

"Why, Uncle, she does though. She told me about,—about,—oh, lots of 'em. She had some doves. An' they always lay two eggs. An'—an'—"

"Yes, we know it was Anne," said Rob, unable to keep from teasing any longer. "Go on, Flannigan."

But Caroline threw a fat rag-doll at him, which stopped his mouth squarely.

Just then the baby stirred and Anne sprang to his side. His fever was down, and, as it was after five o'clock, Uncle suggested that Baby should have some milk and water, and Anne a heartier lunch, and then he would walk home with them.

When he returned from the walk he was very grave and thoughtful. While they were seated at the supper-table he told them that he had met Anne's uncle and aunt, who had come home shortly after he and Anne arrived at the house. They seemed a very different class of people from what one would expect Anne's relatives to be. The man was rough and profane, and the woman was complaining and irritable, perhaps tired from her long ride.

But here Caroline, who had been all attention,

exclaimed: "She's always cross! She hits Anne over the head with the *dish-cloth* jus' for nothing. An' she scolds her all the time!" she ended indignantly.

"How do you happen to know so much about them?" exclaimed Papa, not caring to have his little daughter pick up such undesirable people for friends.

Caroline looked down at her plate. "I went to see the baby," she said.

"Are you never going to stop picking up all kinds of stray babies?" sighed Mamma.

"How did you know there was a baby?" asked Papa.

"I met him in the woods one day with Anne," she explained. "I like Anne, but I don't like her aunt and uncle. An' they don't like her. I know they don't. She had a little bit of money, but she paid it all to them for her board, she said, and now they don't like her any more. An' I don't think they'll let her go to school nex' year, either." And the child nodded her head sagely as she picked up her spoon and returned to her supper.

CHAPTER XIX

LESSONS

"'Do not shoot us, Hiawatha,'
Sang the Opechee, the robin,
Sang the bluebird, the Owaissa,
'Do not shoot us, Hiawatha.'"
Hiawatha, LONGFELLOW.

THE next day Mamma and Aunty, with Caroline to guide them, walked over to Mr. Peake's, to inquire about the sick baby. They found him about as well as ever again, and were as little pleased with his mother as Uncle had been. During their call Anne went about her duties, speaking when she was spoken to, and in every way behaving as a well-bred child should do. "I reckon the baby got all het up," the woman complained, sticking hairpins in and out of her untidy hair. "He ain't never had one of them spells afore. She ain't no hand at all with chillern."

"She doesn't seem very strong," suggested Mamma, looking at Anne's slight figure, bent

under the weight of the heavy baby she carried up and down the floor. And her heart ached for Anne as she thought of her own straight-backed children, their little bodies never bent by too heavy burdens.

"Oh, she's strong 'nuff. She's one o' them white kind that never has no color. Her ol' granpa jest reg'lar spoiled her. She jes' stayed in the house an' read books down there among them southerns till she don't know nothin' but book learnin'." The woman had an unpleasant, whining voice, that was very disagreeable to listen to, and she made no attempt to lower it, that Anne might not hear her unkind words. The child's delicate face flushed and paled, and her soft eyes filled with tears and overflowed. But she wiped them on the baby's little slip and said nothing, but pressed her lips against the soft baby-cheek, to steady their trembling.

"Is Anne going to remain with you?" asked Mamma cautiously, when the woman paused in her complaining.

"Hm!" the woman grumbled. "Don't know where she'd go unless she does," she said. "I'm her only near kin, an' I ain't so awful near either. We ain't got much ourselves without

dividin' with her. I ain't jest sure it's fair to the baby neither.''

When their visit ended, Mamma and Aunty urged Anne to come often to the camp, and wisely invited the woman to come also, and to allow Anne to bring the baby over. She well knew that Anne would not be allowed to come without him.

The afternoon was warm, and as they wandered home they lingered along the sides of the dusty road, gathering flowers and enjoying the birds that flitted about the trees and hedges.

When they reached camp they found Uncle ushering into their out-of-door drawing-room a caller, a rough but honest-looking farmer. In his hands he carried a burden that made the children gather about him in open-eyed horror. Strung on a strong cord were the dead bodies of a scarlet tanager; a goldfinch, in his brilliant black-and-gold plumage; an indigo bunting, blue as the summer sky, from the top of his beak to the tip of his tail, though shading almost to black in places; an oriole; and a herring-gull, its snowy breast all stained with blood. Evidently he had chosen the most beautiful of his native birds for this cruel slaughter, for a more

brilliant little group could scarcely have been collected in this part of the country.

Dropping the birds in a pitiful little heap upon the ground, where their warm blood stained the grass about them, he removed his hat, plainly embarrassed, saying, as he wiped his perspiring forehead: "Your children told me you was huntin' birds around here. I knew it warn't time for game-birds, so I thought you must be after birds for hat-trimmin's. So I shot these here, thinkin' you might buy 'em from me."

The children stared speechless for a moment, while the man stood shifting from one foot to the other, reading in their shocked faces that he had made some kind of a mistake.

Then Caroline, dropping down beside the little blood-stained bodies, and wetting the feathers with her tears, explained between her sobs: "I told him that! I didn't know he'd think we were killing 'em!"

Uncle lifted the still warm little bodies, and gently smoothed the ruffled feathers. The children wondered that he had not spoken a word in the presence of such evident cruelty to the birds he loved to protect. But he realized that

here was a chance to teach a much-needed lesson; and to do the good he wanted it to do, he must choose his words carefully.

"Do you often kill these pretty creatures?" he asked quietly, at last.

"No, sir, I don't," answered the young fellow slowly, as if searching for words, realizing, and much disturbed, that he had done something after all of which these people disapproved.

"No, I never kill 'em at all, in fact," he continued. "You see, my woman likes to see 'em around the place, and if any kid hurts 'em she gets reglar mad. I wouldn't durst tell her that I shot these this afternoon," and he grinned sheepishly, "for she scolded all mornin' after she heard what you was here for."

Uncle's face lit up with relief. "If she feels that way about it, then why did you do it?" he asked.

"Well, sir, money's mighty scurse up my way just now. We've got a little shaver up to our shack," and even in his embarrassment a proud note crept into his voice, "only three days old. An' the wife's been sick bad, an' it takes a lot of money for nursing an' medicin' an' all that.

An' I just thought if I could make an extry dollar or two this way, so easy you know, I ought to do it. For I do need money, else I wouldn't have liked to kill the birds.'' After which long speech he wiped his face, flushed with the heat and embarrassment, and looked uneasily from one to another.

''I see,'' said Uncle. ''Sit down. Sit down,'' and he pushed an easy-chair forward, and smiled in a way that put the man at ease in a moment.

''You misunderstood what our little girl meant. Youngsters like that don't make themselves very clear,'' he explained kindly. ''In fact, I *am* hunting the birds, but only with my eyes or a field-glass, for the purpose of studying them, their ways, their many varieties, what they eat, and so on. Some wise men in this great country of ours,'' he continued, explaining as he would have to a child, ''are studying the birds, trying to find out, without room for doubt, which birds are useful to us, and which destroy things that we need. In a small way I am trying to help them a little. Most farmers will shoot any hawk at sight.''

''Sure,'' said the man, as Uncle paused, wait-

ing for the answer he knew would come. "They kill our chickens."

"Yes, one or two kinds do," Uncle admitted. "But many hawks never touch chickens, but, on the contrary, feed upon snakes, lizards, crickets, grasshoppers, mice,—all of which, as you know, injure your crops. To prove this, the United States government has had the stomachs of many hundreds of hawks opened and the contents examined, thus proving, without any chance for doubt, just what they eat."

The young man stared at him in amazement, new thoughts crowding rapidly into his brain, and reflected in his face, while the children wondered what good all this talk would do the little dead birds at their feet.

"And these pretty creatures," continued Uncle, as if reading the children's thoughts, "are even more harmless, if possible."

"They eat our fruit," argued the young man, eager to justify himself.

Uncle smiled. "Some do, after they have eaten hundreds of cutworms, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and other similar nuisances that might ruin, not only your fruit, but your fruit-trees as well. When they have really saved your fruit

or crops for you, don't you think they deserve a little of the harvest in return? But if you don't want them to take your strawberries or cherries, plant a mulberry-tree or a few useless berry-bushes. The birds really seem to like them better."

The man's face was now alight with understanding. He had taken no pleasure in killing the birds.

"My woman said they ate more bugs and them things than they did fruit," he said proudly. "She's awful fond of birds."

"Now," said Uncle, "I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. I am going to send your wife and you some books to read. They will explain many things about the birds, and, until you have learned to recognize the Cooper's hawk, the sharp-shinned hawk, and the goshawk, and can tell them from the others, I'm going to ask you to put away your gun and not shoot any. The three kinds I mentioned are very destructive, and when you have learned to know them, kill them if you like."

The man grinned. "Sure," he answered good-naturedly, "I reckon you know what you're talkin' about. An' I ain't got anything

against the birds, except if they ruin my crops or git my chicks.'' Then, taking up the bleeding victims, as if about to take his leave, he said doubtfully, half-sheepishly: ''I don't jest know what to do with these. I can't take 'em home, that's sure.'' And he gave his shoulders an expressive shrug.

''I'll buy these from you,'' said Uncle quickly, ''and send them to a museum that I know will be glad to get them.

''Do you know any people near here named Peake?'' he asked, changing the subject abruptly.

''Yes, I do,'' the man said, his face darkening. ''Know all I want to about 'em, an' then some.''

''They have a little girl named Anne,'' continued Uncle.

But the man interrupted quickly. '' 'Tain't theirn,'' he said. ''She's 'dopted or somethin'. Mighty nice little thing, too. My wife likes her mighty well,—but the old man and his woman!'' The man gave another expressive shrug to his shoulders, and then added, ''They say he's awful crool to his beasts.''

"They do?" exclaimed Uncle, much interested, and anxious to learn more.

"Yes. Beats his horses, an' all such like things. My woman jest reg'lar hates that man." And he smiled, as if at some amusing recollection.

"Are they cruel to the child?" asked Uncle, a very stern look in his eyes.

"Well, now, I wouldn't say they was jest crool to her," he answered cautiously. "You know everybody has to work,—she as well as the rest of us."

"Yes," agreed Uncle; "a reasonable amount of work won't hurt her."

"But they do say," the man continued, "that the woman's jest plain mean to the little girl. An' my woman thinks they do work her too hard for such a little pindlin' thing. You see, she ain't used to this cold country yet. She come to us a-cryin' one day because the woman was cross to her, an' she couldn't please her no way."

While they were speaking, Papa was seen returning from a day's fishing up the stream, his creel hanging heavily from his shoulder,

and the green leaves peeping out of the hole in the top, telling that there had been a good "catch."

"Hi! How many?" shouted Uncle, as soon as he came within hearing, glad to change the subject to one less painful, now that he had learned what he feared to be the case.

"Gr-e-at sport!" answered Papa, with real sportsman's joy at a good day's work.

"Wait a moment and see his 'catch'," said Uncle to the young man, who had seized his hat and was starting away.

"Sit down! Sit down!" cried Papa pleasantly, as he set his creel down upon the table with a satisfied thump, and threw himself into an easy-chair. The youngsters crowded about, laying out and counting the trout.

"One, two, three, four, five," they chanted, as Rob held up each one to be admired.

"Oh, a rainbow!" cried Marshall from his hammock. "What a beauty!"

"One, two, three rainbows," counted Rob. "Gee! Dad, this *is* a catch!"

Thirty speckled and rainbow beauties lay among the green leaves, the bottom one weighing a full pound and a quarter.

"How's that for a catch?" laughed Papa, with a true sportsman's pride.

"That's great," said the farmer, grinning good-naturedly. And then the usual questions followed. "Where'd you catch 'em? Bait or flies?"

"Flies," was Papa's indignant reply to the last question; "every single one of 'em." Then came the usual stories of how "this one swallowed the fly,"—a very painful experience, Elizabeth thought, who had once choked on a fish-bone,—and how "this fellow fought"; "hooked this one in the tail," and so on. To all of which Uncle and the visitor listened eagerly, while Mamma and Aunty put the trout away.

"They're fine fish," the man repeated, as he started on his way.

"Vose aren't fish," corrected James firmly, peeping shyly from behind his father's chair. "Vose are *trouts*."

"Oh, that reminds me, youngsters," said Papa, laughing, and rising from his chair. "I brought something home for you. And now we'll find out how much our wise uncle really knows about birds." And thrusting his hand

deep down in his "slicker" pocket, he brought up three fluttering, squawking, half-fledged birds.

"What in the name of reason?" cried Marshall.

"Oh, what are they?" cried the other children in one voice.

"No, I won't tell," laughed Papa. "Ask your uncle."

"Bet you don't know," grinned Rob saucily to his father.

"They're young hawks," said Uncle promptly. "That's easy. Give me a harder one next time. We have just been talking about them. These are sparrow-hawks."

"Oh, can't we keep them?" wailed Caroline, who had understood a part of the talk with the young man. "Will they eat up his chickens?"

"No, I think not," answered Uncle to her last question. "These are very pretty birds, and while they may occasionally eat young birds, their food is almost entirely made up of field-mice and grasshoppers."

"Oh, then we may keep them, mayn't we?" cried Elizabeth, clapping her hands gayly.

"I'll catch all ve sippersops for 'em," prom-

ised James, using their baby name for grasshoppers.

"I'll help!" shouted Sherburne.

"You may try," said Uncle, "though I doubt if you can raise them. And, I warn you, they'll eat a lot."

"The more mice the merrier," laughed Aunty.

"A man up the river shot the old birds," said Papa. "And I begged these of him. I knew you and the kids would like to have them. And, besides, they looked so helpless! I didn't like to leave them to starve."

The young farmer flushed redder than his sunburn at Papa's innocent words, hearing in them a rebuke that was not intended. And every child's eye was upon him, as if to say, "You see how cruel you men are."

"Good-by," he said hastily, and awkwardly crushed his big straw hat tightly down upon his forehead. "I'll remember what you said, sir, an' the wife'll be glad to know you ain't killin' the birds."

"Why didn't you go for him, Uncle?" asked Rob indignantly, when the man was out of hearing.

"Because he was too wise," said Mamma gently, patting Rob's flushed cheek.

"If Uncle had lost his temper, the man would have been angry and offended, and no good whatever could have been accomplished. As it was, Uncle taught him a valuable lesson."

"Besides," said Uncle, "he did it in utter ignorance. I have no patience whatever with those men who used to send other men out to slaughter the beautiful egrets for their plumage, killing them by the thousands, till the ground must have been red with their blood. They could get the feathers in their perfect beauty only during the breeding-season. So they would send men into the woods to kill the birds when the nests were full of helpless young. Then they would knock down or shoot the parent-birds, and tear away the skin on which the beautiful white feathers grew, throwing down the body, still warm, after their horrid work—sometimes, alas! still quivering with a spark of life! Many times, indeed, it was the tearing-off of the skin that killed the poor, tortured creatures. Then the men would go away, leaving the young birds to starve in the nests, call-

ing piteously and vainly to the parent-birds lying dead there in sight! Indeed, I am not at all sure that some of this work is not still done in places.''

''I'll never wear a feather again,'' cried Elizabeth; ''not even a chicken-feather!'' she declared.

''Here! Here! What have I done?'' cried Uncle. For James's eyes were full of tears, and Sherburne had thrown himself face down upon the ground, to shut out the sight of the little dead birds that too well illustrated Uncle's little talk.

''I think we have had enough lessons for to-day,'' he continued, perching a twin upon each shoulder and galloping madly about the dining-table.

''You boys hunt up an old chicken-coop from some of these farmers around here,'' he directed, with what breath he had left when he had finished his gallop, ''and nail chicken-wire over it, and it will make a good cage for your hawks for the present. We'll try to raise them, at least. But they are so wild I don't know how they will stand confinement.'' And he

tumbled a twin into the hammock on either side of Marshall, who promptly tumbled them out upon the ground. In how many such little ways Marshall showed his rapidly returning strength!

CHAPTER XX

LOST-A PICNIC

"He laughs by the summer stream,
Where the lilies nod and dream,
As through the sheen of water cool and clear,
He sees the chub and sunfish cutting sheer.
His are resplendent eyes,
His mien is kingliwise."

One day in July, when the novelty of camp-life had nearly worn out, yet no one wished for the city, Uncle and Papa rowed the whole family down the stream a few miles for an all-day picnic in the Black Woods. This forest was forbidden territory to the children, for it was very dense and wild. Uncle had penetrated its depths and discovered many of its secrets, among them this ideal picnic-ground on the river-bank. The forest was so dark and dense that, when they arrived, Uncle said that the children must keep within sight of the stream in making their explorations.

It was a warm day, and they spent it in quiet ways. Papa, always an ardent sportsman,

fished almost all day, and toward tea-time was still far down the stream. Aunty wandered off with the camera, and Mamma sat by Marshall's hammock, where he rested, watching the children at their games. Anne's aunt had been persuaded to allow the child to join the merry party, and she was enjoying every moment in her quiet way. She drank in Uncle's stories of birds and woodland secrets with shining eyes, seldom speaking, but, when questioned, answering intelligently.

In the afternoon, when the children were so full of a picnic-luncheon that they needed urging to play, Uncle, always watchful of the birds, pointed out to them a kingfisher, perched upon a snag in the river, patiently seeking his prey. The children watched him with keen interest.

His beautiful dress of bluish gray shone, freshly washed in the sun. His huge beak and head, with crest erect, his funny small body and feet, and his bobbed-off tail, made him appear unbalanced, and as if, at any moment, he might pitch headforemost from the snag. And so he did, but not unbalanced. Quicker than the eye could follow his motions he dived into the water, and rose almost immediately with a fish in his

beak. Instead of returning to his perch to devour it, however, he flew away with the feast.

"Ah, so you have a home about here," cried Uncle well pleased; "and Madam Kingfisher, and possibly little Kingfishers, whom you have gone home to feed. His nest will be a hole in the river-bank, high enough to prevent wash-outs in high water, and tunneled far back, Kiddies. I'll give a new bird-book to the one of you who finds it."

Off went the children, eager for the prize and the glory of capturing it. Up and down the stream they searched. Time after time the bird came back to his perch, and time after time flew away with a prize, the little folks in hot pursuit. At six o'clock, at Mamma's call, they gathered together for tea, the bird's secret still undiscovered. Marshall was growing tired, and soon after tea, Uncle decided that he would better take him with Mamma back to camp ahead of the others, several of whom were again hunting the bird's nest. So, calling to Rob that they were going, he and Mamma, Marshall, and Caroline boarded the boat.

"May I go, too?" asked Anne, as they were about to start. "I think Aunt 'Liza will be

looking for me, and Baby likes to have me put him to bed,'' she explained.

''Sure,'' said Uncle pleasantly, and helped her aboard.

''Where are the twins?'' asked Mamma anxiously, as she seated herself.

''They are with Aunty,'' answered Caroline.

''When were they with her?'' questioned Mamma, as the boat glided out into the stream.

''Oh, a while ago,'' answered Caroline, always vague as to time.

''Rob,'' shouted Uncle, ''we're going. Tell the others where we are. You'd better not search much longer for the nest.''

''All right,'' answered Rob, in a disappointed tone, secretly determining to come back tomorrow and find that nest, and not noticing who were aboard the boat, for he was very busy just then cutting his way through a tangle of blackberry bushes.

''You mustn't stay late on account of the twins,'' called Mamma, as the boat rounded a curve and was out of sight. But Rob, busily peering behind some bushes, that hung over the bank, did not hear all of her last words.

A quarter of an hour later the rest of the

party, except the twins, met at the picnic-grounds, ready to start back to camp.

"Where is Mamma?" called Papa from the boat, as he drew up to the bank, asking a man's inevitable first question.

"Gone on ahead," answered Rob. "Marsh was tired, and they thought they'd better go. Uncle said we'd better stop hunting pretty soon."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Papa. "It begins to look stormy, too." And he pointed toward the west, where a heavy cloud hid the sunset.

"Who went with Mamma, Rob?" questioned Aunty.

"Why, Marsh and Caroline and Uncle," answered Rob a little doubtfully.

"What about the twins?" asked Aunty sharply.

"They were with 'em," said Rob carelessly, beginning to load the boat with cushions and other picnic necessaries.

"Are you sure?" persisted Aunty anxiously.

"Why, yes," was the confident answer. "I couldn't see very well, but I heard Caroline talking, and I heard Mamma say something about the twins. They're with 'em all right."

"Pile in. All aboard!" cried Papa from the boat.

"I feel a little anxious," said Aunty, hesitating. "Do you know Elizabeth, whether the twins were with Mamma?"

"I sent them back to her an hour ago," answered Elizabeth confidently. "They couldn't keep up with us, and I didn't want to be bothered with them. Anne's wraps are gone. She must have gone with Mamma, and the twins have tagged at her heels all day."

"Oh, they're all right," said Papa, with a man's usual confidence and impatience.

"Mamma would never have gone without them, so near their bedtime. Come on. It's going to rain." And hurrying them into the boat, Aunty still anxiously looking back, he began swiftly rowing toward camp.

When they had gone but a mile, however, they met the others returning. The twins being with neither party, explanations quickly followed. Mamma had grown anxious about the little ones, and Marshall begged Uncle to turn back.

It was quickly decided that Papa and Rob should return at once to the picnic-grounds and

begin the search for the boys, while Uncle rowed the rest of the party back to camp. When they reached the little dock on Mr. Peake's land Uncle stopped long enough to allow Anne to jump ashore. She would let no one accompany her to the house, and, as it was only a few yards away, bidding her to make haste, Uncle pulled out into the stream again. But wise little Anne had a plan of her own in her head. Running swiftly toward the house, she gave a low, whistling call. In a moment old Trumps, a beautiful shepherd dog, came crawling out of the smoke-house, stretching and yawning, his feathery tail thumping the ground as he crouched at her feet in lazy good nature. "Oh, Trumps," she whispered, "you've got to help to-night"; and the old dog licked her hands as she patted his cold nose. Searching in the smoke-house, she found an old lantern and some matches. Coming out of the darkness, she was surprised to find how light it still was outside. Then, remembering that she was in the northern part of our country, where the sun does not set in July until near nine o'clock, she hastened thankfully down to the dock. Her aunt's light row-boat, in its usual place at the dock, lay

almost motionless in that calm that precedes a storm. Old Trumps had ridden in the boat many times, and at her command he lay quietly down in the bottom. Anne had learned to row only that summer, but the river was so very small, one could not go far astray; and, as she wished to go down-stream, she could at least drift.

So bravely she set forth, and in a very short time she and Trumps leaped ashore at the picnic-grounds. No one was there. Papa and Rob were searching the woods. The rain was now falling and the wind was beginning to blow, but under the dense forest-trees the ground was not yet wet. For a few moments Anne stood wondering how she was to give Trumps the scent. Then, remembering that the twins had spent a large part of the day in a swing Papa had hung for them, she quickly ran to the spot, with Trumps at her heels. It was such a very small swing that only the twins had cared to use it, and, yes, in the gathering darkness their little footprints could be dimly seen all around the spot. A few drops of rain fell on Anne's head.

"Oh, Trumps! Trumps!" she gasped in a

panic, and, grasping the dog by one ear and his collar, she thrust his nose roughly down in the dirt. Trumps immediately resented this unusual treatment, and, sneezing violently from the dirt in his nose, pulled himself out of her hands.

"Oh, Trumps! Trumps!" she sobbed. "Good dog! Find 'em! Find those dear babies for me, Trumps! Oh, please!" But Trumps did not understand this either, and he only looked at her with his big soft eyes, and wagged his tail patiently.

Then, suddenly remembering some words her uncle used one day when showing off the dog's accomplishments, she grasped his collar again, and, more gently this time, forced his nose down to the little foot-prints, saying, as she did so, "Search, Trumps! Search!" Trumps immediately began to run about, his nose close to the ground. Anne stood watching him, her breath coming in short gasps, her eyes wide with fright and anxiety. Suddenly the dog caught up something in his teeth and bounded triumphantly toward her. It was Sherburne's little cap that he had found.

"Oh, Trumps! Good dog!" sobbed Anne;

and, pressing the cap to his nose, "Search! Search! Search!" she cried wildly. Away went Trumps again obediently. The ground was becoming wet now and rain was pouring.

"O dear! O dear! Is the scent *all* washed away?" Anne sobbed, as the dog ran around and around in ever-widening circles, she following at his heels. Suddenly, to her great joy, he bounded away into the woods. Never thinking of fearing the great dark forest, Anne followed. She was forced to run now to keep the dog in sight, as he loped steadily along through the woods. Now and then he would pause for a moment, nosing about, where one little pair of feet, perhaps, had wandered apart from the others. Then, the trails uniting again, he would bound swiftly ahead.

The storm increased in fury. A tree crashed down in the forest; the thunder rolled. Anne, pale to the lips, shuddered as she thought of the helpless babes alone in the storm. Now and then, between the crashes of thunder, she thought she heard Papa's or Uncle's voice calling the names of the twins farther back in the forest, and she tried to answer them, but in her breathless condition her voice could not be heard

far above the noise of the storm. On and on she went, until she wondered if Trumps could be mistaken in thinking that those little feet could have wandered so far.

Immediately after tea the twins had renewed their search for the kingfisher's nest, looking in most impossible places, or tagging at the heels of the older children.

"Wait, Elizabuf," begged James, for perhaps the twentieth time.

And Elizabeth, her patience fast ebbing away, exclaimed, "Oh, Jimmie, you and Sherburne run back to Mamma!"

"Don't want to," said Master James, scowling fiercely. "We want to find the nest!"

"You're too little," argued Elizabeth.

"We're not!" cried James, offended, and growing angry.

"Go back! Please do!" begged Elizabeth. "That's a good boy. Do."

James only kicked at the dirt stubbornly with the toe of his boot, but Sherburne, who had a quite remarkable gift for finding his way in strange places, pulled his sleeve and whispered something to him.

"Come on," he said, "an' we'll perten' to go back, an' when we get in the woods where she can't see us we'll run fast, an' then we'll come back to the river, an' when 'Liz'buf comes we'll be there! I don't never get losted, you know. An' we'll s'prise her." This plan sounds rather vague, but to his twin it was clear enough. They would follow the river, but from farther back in the woods, where they could not be seen by Elizabeth, and surprise her at last by coming out on the stream farther up.

To Elizabeth's satisfaction they trudged off toward the picnic-grounds. "That's good boys," she cried. "Buffy will give you some candy when we get back to camp."

Hand in hand they stumbled along, and after half an hour Sherburne thought that they might venture down to the stream again. But alas! without cause or explanation, at least to the twins, the river had traitorously turned in its course half a mile back, and, though the little ones turned in the right direction, the river was not to be found. They searched cheerfully for another half-hour. Then James began to be discouraged.

But, Sherburne with supreme confidence in

his ability to "find his way," assured James that they would "dust go back the way they had come." So back they turned, but now their little heads were thoroughly muddled, their little legs very, very weary.

"It's lost!" wailed Jimmie. "Ve picnic's lost!"

"And Mamma, too," said Sherburne with trembling lips. "I'm 'fraid they're all lost!"

"And all gone home and left us!" sobbed James, now really crying.

"Don't cry," begged Sherburne, the tears running down his own cheeks. "We'll find 'em. Do tome," he begged. And they dragged their tired legs a little farther.

At last they dropped down upon a grassy spot. "We'll never see 'em any more!" sobbed one.

"I'm 'fraid ve bears'll come an' eat us!" wailed the other.

"It's getting awful dark," said Sherburne, sinking his voice to a whisper. And shuddering, they clasped their arms around each other's necks. Suddenly a vivid flash of lightning lit up the woods.

"I fink I saw ve river!" cried James, spring-

ing to his feet, and together they half ran, half tumbled down the steep bank. Sure enough! Here it was! And the children fairly squealed with delight, for, in their innocent ignorance, they thought that the boats must pass there, going back to camp. It was not so dark here, either, as it was in the woods.

And, wonderful to tell, here was a hole in the bank that looked just as Uncle had said the kingfisher's nesting-hole must look. And while they were peering into the hole, they heard a strange rattling noise overhead, just such as Uncle had said the kingfisher might make. They started back, forgetting their fears for a moment, and hiding themselves behind a bush, they watched the funny bird as he scuttled pigeon-toed into the dark hole, safe at home with wife and babies, ahead of the storm. This little incident over, the twins noticed that it was growing very dark, even down here, and the lightning was more and more vivid. Now the thunder began to rumble threateningly, and the lonely "babes in the wood" clung frantically to one another. Poor, unhappy little fellows! The four brief years of their little life had been so protected! Thunder might roll, and lightning flash, but in

mother's arms one shut one's eyes, and away it all went, while one sailed safely away into dream-land. But here, all alone in the dark! "Oh, Mamma! Mamma!" they wailed in terror.

"Let's say our prayers," said Sherburne at last, and turning, as bigger children turn every day, in desperation to their God, they knelt there in the mud. With the rain beating down on their baby heads, and with absolute faith that He who would note the wee bird's fall, would surely hear their cry, they lisped the Lord's Prayer. When they had finished they crept close to one another, the tears on their baby cheeks mingling as they lay awaiting the Divine answer.

"I wish I was in my mamma's house," wailed James, as he thought of his cozy bed at home.

"I wish I was in my mamma's *bed,*" sobbed Sherburne; and the two clung wildly together. Close under the bank the overhanging bushes protected them somewhat from the fury of the storm, as it came from that direction. But they were already quite drenched and shivering with the cold, and wished that they could creep into the kingfisher's hole, from where, as the fury

of the storm grew less, they could hear an occasional sleepy peep from a restless baby bird disturbed by the storm. The rain ceased at last, and only the distant thunder rumbled, and the distant lightning played about the horizon.

The children, chilled through, were growing sleepy. Suddenly they were aroused by a crashing and scrambling on the bank above their heads, as if some wild animal had come bounding through the forest. In terror greater than the storm had aroused in them, they clung frantically to each other, and crouched close up against the wet and muddy bank.

"It's a bear!" shrieked Sherburne.

"I fink it's a *microbe,*" cried James, wild with terror.

With a yelp of joy, the great beast leaped quite over their heads, and came crashing down at their feet. There he crouched, barking and whining, and licking the tears from their cold cheeks. In a moment they recognized dear old Trumps, with whom they were well acquainted, and throwing their arms about his neck, they hugged his head and kissed his cold black nose.

In a few moments Anne, frightened and scratched, came stumbling and falling through

the bushes. Gathering the two little runaways and the old dog in her arms, she told the little ones how she had come there, and assured them that Trumps would take them safely back to home and their mothers. In a few moments they all crawled stiffly out from under the bank and climbed up to higher ground. Old Trumps gave himself a mighty shake, and then started off on his second journey. He was in a great hurry to get home now, and it was all the tired children could do to keep up with him. Urging the twins to call Uncle, Papa, and Rob, Anne cried "Found!" and "Help!" as loud as she could, in her childish voice. Suddenly Trumps began to bark, and in a few minutes the twins were gathered into the arms of Uncle and Papa.

"And where did you come from?" gasped Uncle, giving Anne a little shake, and looking at her as if he saw a ghost. For had he not left her on the dock himself an hour ago? Anne quickly explained, and with a few words of the deepest gratitude, which brought the hot blushes to her cheeks, they wrapped her snugly in blankets and helped her into her own boat, in which Papa rowed her safely home.

That night as Uncle brought warm drinks to

the twins' bedside, where Mamma and Aunty had tucked them up warm and dry, Jimmy looked up drowsily to say, "We found ve nest, Uncle."

"We bof found it," corrected Sherburne. "How will you 'vide the book?"

"There'll be two books," laughed Uncle, as he patted the two heads, thinking how thankful they should be that both were there; "and a great big juicy bone for old Trumps!"

"And what for Anne?" asked a sleepy voice. "*She* found *us*."

"We'll see," was all he answered.

CHAPTER XXI

HUMMING-BIRDS' HOME LIFE

"Is it a monster bee?
Or is it a midget bird?
Or yet an air-born mystery,
That now yon marigold stirred;
And now on vocal wing
To a neighbor bloom has whirred
In an airy ecstasy, in a passion of pilfering?
Ah! 'Tis the humming-bird,
Rich-coated one,
Ruby-throated one."

Noon always found a merry little party gathered about the long dining-table. Marshall could join the happy circle, and no one but an invalid knows how that sharpens the appetite. His cheeks were growing less hollow every day, and the old sad, weary look in his eyes had given place to a happy light that never waned. Mamma's heart was so full of thanksgiving that she never guessed that her own cheeks were growing round and rosy as her daughter's. Indeed, the abundance of fresh air and sunshine was doing its good work for each one. The

twins raced about over the land from morning till night, their bodies plump and their skin as brown as an Indian's.

"Any man could stand a sedentary life if he had my office," said Uncle one day, as he rose from his "desk," to answer the ever-welcome call to dinner. His "desk" was only a stump over which he had nailed a top of broad, flat pine boards. Underneath was a deserted woodpecker's hole, where he stored his letters. Here he would write by the hour, gleaning information at his very door.

As they were all sitting about the table, James, deftly stripping the bones from his trout, said in his quaint, drawling way, "Bugs have nestses and lay eggses."

"What!" cried Rob, with elder-brotherly superiority. "No, they don't! Just listen to that, Uncle!"

"They do, too!" cried Sherburne, forgetting his shyness, in his indignation at hearing his beloved twin ridiculed. "They do, too!" he repeated. "We saw 'em, we did!" While little James shrank into his chair, overwhelmed with embarrassment.

"Yes, some do, Rob," said Uncle. "Have

you forgotten that ants' nest that I showed you?"

"Vese wasn't vose ants," said James, recovering confidence at Uncle's words.

"Vese was a big beetle. I'll show you his nest after dinner."

The meal finished, the children and Uncle started upon their quest. James led them to a tree near the river-bank, across the grove from their camp. Here he stopped and pointed to a little lichen-covered lump on a low branch of the tree.

"It's only a knot after all!" cried Elizabeth, much disappointed, as Rob reached up to pull down the branch.

"Be careful!" cried Uncle. "Don't touch it, Rob! Look again. Look closely."

"Why, it is a nest!" cried Anne, who was with them, and who was using a glass from a little distance. "Of all the funny kinds! Why it looks just like it grew on the tree, and it's beautiful!"

"It does indeed look so," said Uncle, "and I wonder that the twins ever discovered it."

"We saw the muvver-bug," said James gravely.

"You will soon see that it belongs to a ruby-throated humming-bird," said Uncle, smiling. "The male bird has a ruby-red collar, or rather throat. That is what gives him that part of his long name. The mother-bird did all that beautiful work without any help from her husband. She isn't at home just now, so we may take a peep at her nursery." So saying he lifted the twins up on his shoulders, that they might have a good look at the wee, squeaking mites in the nest, not any bigger than large blue-bottle flies.

"It isn't birds," cried Sherburne, more than ever convinced of it, now that he saw the baby birds. "There's two black bugs in there!"

In fact, not until the exquisite little golden-green mother came home to her twins, and alighted upon the nest, were they convinced that she was other than a great buzzing beetle. She seemed not at all timid, but Uncle hid the children behind trees and bushes, that he might allow them to remain and see her feed the tiny creatures without frightening her. Settling herself upon the edge of the nest, the wee mother, in some unaccountable way, dragged one of the little ones to the top. Then, holding

it securely there, while the children waited to see her put some bird titbit into the greedy mouth, she suddenly made a vicious stab down the youngster's throat with her spear-like beak. At the first attack, as one might call it, Caroline gave a little cry and rolled over on the grass, hiding her face in her hands, and imploring Uncle to "Stop her! Stop her! She's killing them!"

"Oh, how awful!" cried Anne, shuddering. And as the mother-bird made stab after stab into the helpless little creatures, she too turned away her head, quite unable to witness this "Slaughter of the Innocents," as she believed it to be.

Elizabeth peeped out from behind her Uncle, ready to hide her eyes at a moment's notice. Rob even sent anxious glances at his Uncle, wondering why he did not interfere. The twins alone stared in open-mouthed wonder.

And Uncle, shaking with laughter, sat down upon a log, and, taking the twins upon his knees, explained to the shocked little party that, although the performance is not a pleasant one to see, it is the usual way that the humming-bird mother feeds her young, by injecting the food

that she has already partly digested for them, into their stomachs.

"They never seem to mind it at all, as you see," he said, "though she really seems to stab quite through their wee bodies."

"If her beak only hadn't been so long," Elizabeth said, when, the performance over, they watched the beautiful little creature dart from flower to flower, her wings vibrating with inconceivable rapidity, as she hung above the blossoms, her golden-green body glistening like metal in the sun. "If it hadn't been so *awful* long, I wouldn't have minded, but I thought every minute that she would fly away with one of her babies sticking on her beak."

The children were sorry to leave after watching her for half an nour, but Uncle assured them that if she was not frightened, she would remain about there for two or three weeks, and they might see her every day.

The last of July, in the northern part of our country, finds most of our birds teaching their young to fly; or, if sitting, it is to hatch the second or third brood. Here and there we find a bird is always late about housekeeping affairs, generally for the simple reason that she

comes north late, as that is the time when the food that she prefers will be most plentiful. Such is the case with the beautiful little pair, Mr. and Mrs. Goldfinch, who flit gayly about until late June or July, before they settle down to housekeeping.

"Here is some kind of a sparrow," said Rob, later that afternoon, pulling down a long, willowy branch, that he might peep into a little nest. As he spoke, a beautiful black-and-gold bird flew about his head, making sudden little dashes at him, as if about to snatch out his eyes.

"What are you making such a fuss about, Mr. Goldfinch?" he said, ducking his head to avoid the sharp beak, and letting the branch swing gently back. "This is none of your affair."

"Are you quite sure of that?" called Uncle, who was some distance away. "I thought so," he said, as he turned his glass that way. "Why, Rob, did you expect little Madam Goldfinch to dress in such bright clothes as those her husband wears, when she has such precious treasures to protect? If she did that, she would attract every boy, hawk, and snake to

her treasure-house. That greenish-brown bird above you is the rightful lady of the house, Madam Goldfinch."

"Why, she looks just like the goldfinches we saw in the winter," cried Elizabeth. "Were they all females?"

"No," said Uncle, "they were not. In the winter Mr. Goldfinch puts on a suit like his wife's. You must not be like 'Freckles,' in that beautiful story of Gene Stratton Porter's, and try to drive away from the nest all birds unlike the one you have seen sitting there. You will find that the female indigo-bunting, towhee, bobolink, rose-breasted grosbeak, and others, look somewhat like English sparrows. And the female redstart, tanager, pine-grosbeak, crossbill, oriole, and many others, while not like sparrows, are very unlike the males. This, as I believe I have told you before, is called by the ornithologists, 'protective coloration.' Big words, eh, Twinnies?" But even Rob for a moment looked puzzled, as Uncle rolled forth the words so easily. "Well, they only mean that the colors of the female, being so much like the leaves, bark, and twigs of the trees, or the ground and grasses about her, protect her

from her enemies as she sits upon her nest. Sometimes it is very difficult, even for us who are accustomed to this, to discover the birds on their nests, they are so like their surroundings.'' Uncle tried very hard to make his explanations so simple that even the twins could understand him. And, while much that he said was far beyond their understanding, still they were all unconsciously picking up here and there stray bits of information, and, best of all, learning to value and be gentle with all living things. It inspired confidence regarding their future lives.

As they walked toward home, they paused to listen to some bobolinks that were fairly outdoing themselves in their bursts of merriment.

''How pretty they are!'' cried Anne. ''I neveh saw one befo'e! Why, they are upside-down birds. Most birds are light underneath and da'k above, and these are just the otheh way. And, oh, Buffy, do you see their little yellow colla's? Aren't they just too cunning?''

''I think you have seen them before, Anne,'' said Uncle, smiling. ''Have you never seen the rice-birds down south?''

''Why, yes,'' cried Anne. ''They kill them and sell them.''

"Your rice-birds are our bobolinks in their winter plumage," explained Uncle.

"O deah!" cried Anne, really distressed. "I think it's dreadful to eat such deah little birds as these! I'm right glad I neveh touched them."

"I didn't know they were so pretty," admitted Elizabeth. "And I've heard of them, and, I expect, seen them lots of times. I guess I didn't know much of anything about birds till Uncle came."

"Why, Uncle, they act just as if they were trying to be funny!" cried Rob. "I had some puppies once that acted just like them. They almost roll over like puppies."

"Indeed they do," laughed Uncle. "The poets seem to like to write about them and their funny ways. But I will spare you any poetry just now, for I see Rob's face growing long. Their song, though it is not beautiful like the thrush's, is very attractive."

"They just love to sing, don't they," commented Caroline, watching them closely.

"They certainly seem to," answered Uncle, patting her touseled head. "Do any of you

know that bird?'' pointing to a bird perched on a fence-post and pouring out his very heart in music.

''That brown bird with a yellow vest and a black collar? I think I know him,'' Elizabeth spoke doubtfully. ''Is it the meadow-lark?''

''It is, indeed,'' laughed Uncle. ''Well, well, I believe you children did know a robin, a blue-bird, and an English sparrow when I came, but that was about all,'' he said in a whimsical tone. ''For I do think, Elizabeth, you were very uncertain about little Mr. Meadow-lark.''

A few rods farther on they came to the bush which held the treasures of the little field-sparrow. The twins had kept a faithful watch over the little family, reporting each day's progress of the babies, and now, when they spied the bush, as usual they started to run ahead. But Rob was in a teasing humor, and grasped each child by the arm and held him back.

''No! No!'' he teased. ''You can't go! Walk along like little gentlemen with us now!''

The boys struggled fiercely, half angry, but making an effort to control their tempers. ''Come now,'' he continued, enjoying his mis-

chief, "we are going this way," and he attempted to pull the children along in another direction.

Then the little boys grew angry. Naughtily they kicked at him, dusting his trousers until they were white, but he would not release his hold, laughing all the time, though the twins were now having a hard time to keep from crying.

But suddenly the tables were turned. Uncle, coming up behind them, caught Rob unexpectedly by both arms, and made him release his hold. Then laughing, and without an effort, threw him headlong into a ditch full of dusty weeds.

With howls of triumph the twins bounded away. But their shouts were quickly changed to wails, for, as they approached the bush, a lean, gaunt cat slid silently from under it, and, running almost flat upon the ground, she quickly disappeared in a corn-field, licking her chops as she ran.

About the bush flew the terrified little parent-birds, giving shrill cries of trouble. But, alas! the little nest was empty! A few bloody feathers were the silent witnesses of the tragedy.

"Oh, Rob, you wicked boy!" screamed Sherburne, when he fully realized the extent of their loss—that their own little charges were gone, every one! Killed almost before their very eyes!

"If you hadn't held us, we'd have got here in time to scare her away, and she wouldn't have got our little birds!" and James in his anger again turned upon Rob. But Uncle quickly took him into his arms, and held him there until his anger dissolved in tears. And Rob, looking the picture of guilt, stood sullenly kicking the dust.

"I didn't know the ol' cat was there," was all he could say in excuse. "I didn't want the birds killed any more'n you did!" And he threw a rock into the corn-field where the cat had disappeared.

"Never mind," said Uncle, trying to act as peacemaker, and comfort the little ones at the same time. "Rob did not know that the cat was there, and after she had once found the birds' nest, I think she would have come back again and again until she got them."

But the twins were sadly disappointed, and it was several days before they could pass the bush quite calmly.

Supper was upon the table, and the children's tears had been but shortly dried, when a tall figure was seen coming through the grove, carrying a basket.

"It's our bird-man," cried Elizabeth, as he drew near.

"The one that brought the killded ones," explained Sherburne.

"It is, indeed," said Uncle, rising to greet the visitor. "I didn't think we'd see him again."

"What's he got?" cried Caroline, in a stage whisper.

"Good afternoon," said Uncle pleasantly, with hand outstretched, as the man came awkwardly, plainly deeply embarrassed, into their little group.

"G'daft'rnoon," he began. "I, um—my woman said"— Then, suddenly remembering his manners, he snatched his big hat off, and, dropping it upon the grass, began vigorously mopping his perspiring face with a huge red handkerchief.

"Hot day," remarked Uncle, pushing forward a chair.

And Mamma hastened to the ice-box, return-

ing with a big pitcher of lemonade, asking, as she gave him a brimming glass, "How is the baby? Standing this hot weather pretty well?"

"Fine! Fine!" the man answered, his whole face shining with pride,—and perspiration. "Weighs ten pounds a'ready! I seen your children seemed so tickled with those hawks your man brung 'em th'uther day," he continued, regaining his composure, "that I thought, or m'woman did, mebbe they'd like a pet I brung home to her not long ago. Sence the boy come she ain't been able to take very good care of it." And, taking the top off of the basket, he showed them, crouched down upon the bottom, his yellow eyes shining with fear, a half-grown crow.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" shouted the children in different keys. Rob gave a long shrill, ear-piercing whistle, while Sherburne turned a lop-sided somersault.

When their noise had abated somewhat, Elizabeth explained to the young farmer, her eyes shining with pleasure, her cheeks very red: "We've wanted one ever since last spring. We saw one out in the country."

"He was an awful fine one," interrupted Rob.

"And smart! But O gee! How he would steal!"

"Yes, they all do that, I reckon," the man admitted.

"Ours won't!" cried James indignantly, gently stroking the straggling black feathers backward. "Ours won't be teached to steal."

"Maybe you can teach him to talk," suggested Anne. "I've hea'd they can be taught to talk a little."

"Oh, can they, Uncle?" cried Rob, much excited at the prospect. "You bet if they can be, I'll teach mine!"

"Yours! Hm!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

"I think we'll call him Sherburne's," said Uncle kindly, "to make up to him for the little cedar-bird, you know. But we can all enjoy him." And as Sherburne shouted and turned many *very* lopsided somersaults, Uncle continued, "I'm afraid you can't teach him to talk, but crows are very smart, and you ought to be able to teach him a good many little things and find him very interesting."

"I'm afraid he'll be worse than burglars," sighed Mamma, when the giver had gone away

well pleased, his ruddy face beaming with pleasure at the children's delight with his gift.

"Yes," laughed Aunty, "I've always looked under my bed at night for burglars. Now I'll have to look behind the curtains and in my waste-paper basket!"

But the children were utterly happy, and the twins almost forgot their recent loss in the joy of the present moment.

CHAPTER XXII

NIGHT IN THE FOREST

"In forest arms the night will soonest creep,
Where somber pines a lullaby intone,
Where Nature's children curl themselves to sleep,
And all is still at last."

E. Pauline Johnson.

After much coaxing for many days, the children succeeded in obtaining the permission of their parents to go at night into the Black Forest with Uncle, to study the night-birds.

"What can you possibly see at night?" argued Mamma.

"Oh, we might possible see a *bear,*" cried Caroline, much excited at the prospect.

"Why, owls, Mumsy, and nighthawks, and,—and," Rob paused to think of another bird, and Elizabeth took up the sentence.

"And whippoorwills, Mamma; and I've never seen a whippoorwill. Not one of us has."

"Nor ever will, I fancy," laughed Mamma, who had always looked upon it as a fictitious

bird until she came up here, though really knowing better.

"It's as dry as,—as,—as dry," pleaded Elizabeth, foreseeing a possible objection in the weather. "It just *can't* rain, and it's so *hot!* Why we couldn't take cold if we went in our nighties!"

"Are you sure that you want all of these little folks, Uncle?" Mamma appealed to that good-natured gentleman.

"I shouldn't have asked them, if I hadn't wanted them," was his answer.

"Sometimes the asking comes from the other side," laughed Mamma, yielding slowly.

"But not this time, it didn't! Truly! Truly! Mamma!" cried Elizabeth, dancing up and down in her eagerness.

"Honest truly, black and bluely," chanted Caroline.

"We-ll, will you stick close to Uncle, Caroline? Every minute?"

"Oh, yes! yes! I promise! On my yonner, Mamma," she cried, trying to use a word of her big brother's, and hugging her mother almost to suffocation in her eagerness, as she saw consent approaching.

"And Robert, will you take good care of Elizabeth? Keep her in sight every instant?"

"Hm! Hm!" sniffed Elizabeth, but only loud enough for her brother's ear.

Rob looked very doubtful. "She won't listen to me, Mamma," he complained.

"Yes, I will this time, Rob," cried Elizabeth, ready to promise anything to secure the coveted permission. "Now, Rob, you know you can go anyhow, even if you don't take me, and I think it's real mean"—

"Tut! Tut!" cried Uncle, anxious to quell the storm of words he saw approaching. "Rob, Rob, where is your chivalry?"

"Oh, all right," said Rob, trying to speak pleasantly. "I'll look after Buff," and his breast swelled with pride, as he realized the trust Mamma was putting in him. "I'll look after Buff," he repeated, "but you keep Flannigan in sight." The Irish name suited Caroline, for she was sure to be "gone again" when wanted.

So the matter was settled, and that night at nine o'clock, Elizabeth's usual bedtime, they started upon their unusual excursion. The twins had pleaded long, but vainly, to be of

the party. Wise parents could not be persuaded by tears or even temper, a little of which, I am afraid, was used, that four-year-olds should be abroad at night. So, tucked up in their little beds, with eyes closed, pretending sleep, they listened to the departure of the others.

"Don't stay late," called Aunty for perhaps the tenth time, as the shadows of the merry party mingled with the shadows of the trees in the wood, and they were really off, "to make a night of it," Rob said.

"Don't go too deep into the Black Woods," called Mamma's voice from the dimly lighted tent, showing among the trees like some queer, huge ghost. "Remember they *say* that there are wild-cats in there, and I *know* that there are *snakes!*" Mamma's pet horror was snakes, and her thrilling words sent delightful little chills tickling up and down the children's spines, as they stumbled along, their eyes still unused to the darkness.

They went first through their "own woods," as they called the little grove in which their tent was pitched, emerging upon the other side in about half an hour. Here Anne met them, hav-

ing been invited especially by Uncle, and they all sat down upon the river bank, to rest and enjoy the starlight upon the water, while Uncle, by the aid of a little shaded electric dark-lantern, made a few notes.

The woods were very still. A whip-poor-will called a long way off, and was answered by several others. A tree-toad near by sung shrilly. The water lapped gently at their feet. The children's eye-lids drooped. Caroline's head dropped to her knees. Elizabeth, too drowsy to arouse her, leaned back against a tree and almost slept. Rob now and then tossed a pebble into the dark water, or yawned sleepily as he lay upon the ground, watching it creeping, creeping, ever creeping. His head bobbed forward and he sprang to his feet. He would surely go to sleep if he sat there any longer, and sleep he would not! Not when he had been given charge of Elizabeth, and with Anne's bright eyes to see him! Never! Had Uncle quite forgotten them, he wondered?

Marshall seemed content to sit and slap the water with a little switch in lazy enjoyment. Perhaps Uncle was waiting to rest Marshall. Turning away from the creeping river, he stared

back into the dark woods through which they had come. His sleepy eyes ached as they tried to penetrate the dark shadows. It looked very tame in there, and he wished Uncle would stop scribbling and come on to the Black Woods, where things might be more exciting. As he stared at the silent trees they seemed to become blurred and to run together. Pulling himself up with a start, he was astonished to find that, though he was standing leaning against a tree, he had actually slipped over the border-land of sleep.

Throwing a swift glance at the others, to see if they had noticed his lapse, he stretched himself and wandered a few yards into the woods. Nothing was stirring. The trees barely moved in the light breeze.

Ah! Was that something white moving off there among the shadows? Yes. No. Yes, there it was again, coming toward him,—a shadowy white figure. These children had not been brought up on foolish ghost-stories, but they had made some acquaintance with them through old 'Merica. And I must admit that Rob did feel a thrill, half of pleasure, go through him, as some of her silly stories im-

mediately popped into his mind. But he argued bravely with himself:

"It must be a calf, or else I was mistaken altogether, for I can't see it now. I was awful sleepy," and he peered sharply into the darkness. Ah, there it was again. Plainly something was coming towards them. Turning back to tell Uncle, he found him just putting up his note-book, and trying to pull Caroline out of her dreams.

"I didn't intend to stop so long," he said to the sleepy girls, as they rubbed their stiffened arms and legs.

"Come, we'll race across the corn-field. It's only ten o'clock after all."

Rob hesitated, wondering if it was necessary to mention what he had seen, as he could no longer see it, and Rob dreaded ridicule. As he stood undecided, kicking the pebbles about with his toe, a shrill squeal from Caroline brought them all to her side.

"Here! Here!" cried Uncle. "This won't do! You said you would not be afraid in the woods at night."

"There's something in 'em," cried the child. "Something 'at I didn't espect."

As she spoke, an owl, flying low over his earthly dining-table, gave an awful shriek almost overhead. Caroline immediately echoed it, hiding her head in Elizabeth's skirts.

Almost at the same instant, to Uncle's amazement, came another cry of fright, like the cry of a child. Uncle's thoughts flew to the several different wood-creatures that gave such a cry.

"What is it?" he said, peering somewhat anxiously into the shadowy woods.

"I think," said Rob, trying vainly to hide his nervousness, "there's something white back there in the grove. I guess 'twas a cow, or—or something."

Uncle promptly tramped back into the woods, Caroline sticking to him like a little burr. Mamma need have no fear of her leaving him.

"What in the name of all that's queer, is is?" he said wonderingly, as two bobbing, bowing figures approached him. "Is it a calf?"

"It's two of 'em!" exclaimed Anne, whose eyes were sharper than Uncle's.

"Two calves?" he said, as the cry was repeated.

"No, no!" chimed in Elizabeth, not in the least frightened. "Two something elses."

"It's little ghostses," wailed Caroline, clinging to Uncle's coat-tails so that he could scarcely walk.

"Caroline!" he said in a stern voice that she scarcely knew for Uncle's. "Stop that nonsense about ghosts!"

Suddenly Elizabeth ran swiftly forward. "You naughty, naughty boys!" they heard her cry as she ran, stumbling and half falling in her haste. Catching the white objects by the shoulders, she shook them fiercely.

"The twins!" gasped Uncle, hurrying toward them, Rob and Anne close behind him.

Elizabeth was sitting flat upon the ground when they came up to her, the twins in her lap, while she scolded and cuddled them.

"What shall we do with them?" she cried, as Uncle stood before them, dismay showing upon his face. "We can't take them with us. They're not dressed!"

"Spank 'em!" said that good-natured man, this time more than a little provoked. "Why did you run away, you naughty boys?" he said sternly, to the now trembling little culprits, clothed only in white pyjamas and bed-room slippers.

"We didn't have time to dress," stammered James, avoiding the main point, as he well knew. " 'Lisbeth said folks couldn't take cold, even in their nighties."

Elizabeth looked guilty. "I did, Uncle," she said, blushing in the dark.

"You knew you were being naughty," cried Rob. "I shouldn't have thought you would have done this, after all the trouble you made before!" with very big-brotherly dignity.

"We'll not be trouble this time," wailed Sherburne with quivering lip. "You said there wouldn't be any storm to-night!"

"Well, we'll let your parents settle this," said Uncle, mounting the two in their usual places upon his shoulders, his heart relenting, as he saw the pitiful little faces, and knew how disappointed they must be. For Uncle knew how hard it is sometimes to be "too little."

"Don't take us home," begged James.

"Oh, but I must do that," said Uncle firmly. "Think how your poor mammas would worry." And he strode off toward camp.

Before they had gone half-way, however, they met Papa and Aunty coming with old Dane, quite breathless and much excited. Uncle

gladly turned the little ones over to them, and Caroline, having seen quite all she wanted to of the forest at night, was glad to return with them. But Marshall, Rob, Elizabeth, and Anne turned back with Uncle, to finish their interrupted excursion.

They followed the sandy shore of the river for a few rods, and then turned towards the forest. As they were crossing a barren field, with many low, flat rocks scattered here and there, the children were startled by some rather large bird, which swooped down close to their heads, and, as quickly rising, disappeared in the woods not far away.

"A night-hawk," said Uncle. "Perhaps we shall see her again."

It was not very dark here in the open pasture, and Uncle searched the ground with his eyes as they tramped along. Warning them to tread cautiously, he led them almost across the pasture, then stopped, and, pointing to a low, flat rock, he showed the children two tiny, fuzzy balls. It was some time before they could distinguish the wee birds in the dim light, so like were they to their surroundings.

"Baby night-hawks," whispered Uncle, and

leading the children a little distance away, he hid them behind some bushes.

Suddenly, from out of the dark forest, came softly rustling wings, and Mother Night-hawk settled down beside her little ones. She was at least ten inches long, and the children were sorry not to be able to see her coloring, and surprised to find how easily she might escape notice as she crouched there upon the ground. The baby mouths, or, as Rob said, "the baby heads," flew open at the instant of the mother's approach. Indeed, they did seem to open their entire heads, their mouths were so enormous, and it gave them an utterly silly expression to sit there gaping for food. But Mother Night-hawk knew well how to fill them. She fed both babies from the abundance she carried in her mouth, for it is more like a mouth than a beak, and then flew away for more.

Elizabeth was loath to leave the little creatures there all alone, for she was sure something would get them. But it was growing late, and Uncle said they must hurry on.

"To-morrow," said he, "I will show you the night-hawk's picture. She is no beauty, with her wide mouth and rather dull plumage, mot-

tled brown, gray, and black. But she is an interesting bird. She does not wander abroad so much at night as the whippoorwill does; but I have seen her flying around a city at night, and her eggs have been found upon the flat roofs of buildings.''

Another short walk and they entered the Black Woods. The forest was very dense, and the dark shadows of night made it seem even more thickly wooded than it really was. There was a thick undergrowth, and the trees were large and close together. The farmers said that a few deer might yet be found there, and that wild-cats were sometimes heard. They even whispered that wolves were even heard howling in the winter. Smaller animals, such as weasels, rabbits, and hares, were trapped there, and by the river were taken occasional otters and many muskrats. Some insisted that a lynx might sometimes be seen in the deepest part of the forest.

Uncle had gone over the ground in the daytime, and had located several nests and points of interest which he wished to show to the children, and had marked a rough path for them to follow. Not wishing them to be frightened

by any animal in search of a supper, he kept his little charges close to him, and led them carefully.

At first they skirted the edge of the forest, coming out in about half an hour upon the river bank again. Here they sat down for a few moments' rest, and here they had a delightful surprise; for while they sat silently waiting, a beautiful doe and two exquisite fawns came stepping noiselessly out of the forest. The little party scarce dared to breathe, lest they make some noise that would frighten the timid creatures; but, the wind being toward them, the deer drank their fill slowly, lifting their heads now and then as if to give thanks. They wandered slowly back into the woods, nibbling the undergrowth as they went, all unconscious that the dreaded "man terror" had been so near.

How fascinating it all was! The children lost all thought of sleep. Their nerves were tense. Uncle began to wonder if he ought to have brought them. But they were not frightened, only awed by this great, mysterious, unknown world, and deeply interested.

The calls of the whippoorwills were becoming louder and more constant. Suddenly out of

the blackness above them something dropped, with a strange whirring noise, almost at their feet, but, with a harsh cry, was up and away again almost instantly. On the ground, near where the bird had alighted, Uncle showed the children what they thought were two little white stones, but he assured them they were the eggs of a whippoorwill.

"Probably," he said, throwing his little electric light upon them, "having seen us here, so near her eggs, she will carry them away in her mouth to some other place which she considers safer. Her mouth, too, is enormous, and is surrounded by stiff bristles,—very convenient for carrying eggs. She is not any prettier than the night-hawk, and, in fact, looks a good deal like her." Once an owl swooped down without a sound, and, from under their very noses, or rather toes, snatched a wee struggling ground-squirrel. He sailed away to his home in a tree, and a little later Uncle showed them the balls of undigested bones, hair, etc., about the tree, where he had thrown it out of his stomach, when he had got all the good of the food, as is the way of owls.

Elizabeth looked very much disgusted when

Uncle explained this really sickening habit, and declared that she would never like owls again, and that she thought they "ought to be taught to dress their game before eating it." But when Uncle showed her, a little later, three funny-faced, feathery balls, sitting so solemnly all in a row on a branch, patiently waiting to be fed, she concluded that, rather than give up such cunning little creatures, she would endure their bad habits.

At eleven o'clock they turned toward home, taking a different and shorter way through the woods. Elizabeth, stumbling sleepily along, was brought up wide-awake again, when a large snake slid silently across her very toes.

"Ah!" cried Uncle. "We scared him away from his supper. See, here is a tiny whippoorwill. His brother is very likely in the snake's stomach. I'm glad that he at least missed getting one of them."

"Why can't all snakes be killed?" cried Anne, shuddering. "They aren't good for anything!"

"Oh, yes," said Uncle, always ready to defend his beloved woods-people; "they aren't altogether bad. But I do think that they are

more generally hated than any living creature. Some day I will teach you something about them.''

A rustling in the adjacent bushes just then attracted their attention. Uncle went cautiously forward, motioning the children behind him, where they waited, half-trembling with excitement, while Rob could not refrain from pushing just a little ahead.

And Marshall said, with all a big brother's dignity, ''You children stay close to me.''

It was delightfully ''scary,'' Elizabeth said.

''Some animal is after a game-bird, I think,'' said Uncle, as loud bird-cries of terror came out of the darkness. A wild growling and snarling followed, and Uncle ran forward into the shadows. Then, to their amazement, and to Rob's unbounded admiration, he fired a pistol.

''It's nothing much,'' he called back to them; ''but you keep back where you are. Keep them there, Marshall!''

Oh, what delightful thrills of excitement chased themselves up and down the children's spines. They had never dreamed Uncle had a pistol, and now to have him need it was joy

indeed. They felt so safe in Uncle's care that the slight element of danger was only delightful.

As he spoke, from some bushes near at hand bounded some animal much larger than a cat, but with catlike motions. Leaping over fallen branches, stumps, and low bushes, Uncle followed the creature, firing his pistol several times as he ran; each time making the children shiver, or dance with delight, as in Rob's case.

The animal had a large bird in its mouth, and as it slid silently away, belly close to the ground, by the aid of his electric lamp Uncle could easily follow its trail of blood, but whether from the wounded bird or its own wounds he could not tell.

However, the children must not be kept out any later, so he regretfully fired a parting shot or two after the disappearing creature, and turned back to the waiting children. He found them much excited and full of questions, and promised that some day they would come over and see if they could find the creature's dead body around there anywhere.

"But now," said he, "we have had enough for to-night. Rather more thrilling than I expected. It is half-past eleven o'clock, and I

promised to have you in by midnight, so we must hurry a little.''

''Oh, it was grand!'' sighed Elizabeth, as they trudged wearily home.

''It was just jolly!'' agreed Rob. '' 'Specially the thing Uncle shot.''

CHAPTER XXIII

A FOREST FIRE

"From out of the depths of the forest,
Ineffably sad and lorn,
Like the yearning cry of a long-lost love,
The moan of the dove was borne."

To tell of each day's events would weary young readers, and yet each day brought some incident of interest to the little Marsdens.

The middle of August found the birds gathering in flocks, preparing to start upon their long journey to the south. Grackles, with their beautiful iridescent plumage, strutted about under the trees. Crows and swallows could be seen in large flocks in the evening. Orioles disappeared the first week in August, and would have been seen no more until the last of the month, but for a woods tragedy that occurred at this time. It seemed strange to the children to see the birds' uncles, cousins, and aunts, gathering from all directions, "for all the world as if they were all going to Grandma's for

Thanksgiving dinner," so Caroline announced, as they all sat about under the trees, or lay swinging gently in hammocks one hot afternoon.

"They're going where I'd like to be going," said Anne with an unexpected sigh, that only by coughing violently was prevented from being a sob. The child's tone was so sad that Aunty bent low over her sewing to hide a tear in her own eyes, and Uncle forgot to turn the pages of his book, as he listened to the children's conversation.

"Where'd you live?" questioned Caroline, with the usual small child's tactlessness.

"In South Car'lina," answered Anne. "Eve'body liked eve'body the'a," she said wistfully, falling more and more into her southern accent, as she recalled her old home. "We nevah went days an' days without evah seeing anybody,—and the snow so deep all round!" And the homesick child shuddered at the recollection of the heavy snows of February and March, when she was closely housed with her irritable aunt.

"It ain't that way where we live!" cried Caroline indignantly. "We see folks every

day, an' we don't live in the country, an' we have long tramps with Uncle, an', an',—"

"Yes, it must be nice the'eh. And, with Ma'shall 'most well now, you-all 'll have a right nice winteh, I reckon."

"Of course we shall," cried Rob, with a boy's dislike for any expressed sentiment. "Maybe you can come and visit us." And, springing to his feet, he suggested, "Come, let's go over to the Black Forest and find one more nest."

"Wait a moment," said Uncle, laying down his book. "Anne, little girl, do you still wish to go to school this winter?"

"Oh, seh, I do so much!" cried the child, clasping her hands in her usual impulsive little gesture. "I have been to school every winteh some. But—but—Aunt 'Liza says she needs me to mind Baby," and a sob choked her voice.

"Yes," said Uncle, "but I think, Anne, that you will find that your aunt has changed her mind about it."

"Oh, seh, are you right suah?" cried Anne, clasping and unclasping her hands as she stood before him.

"Yes, I am sure, little girl. The truth is, I have long had a feeling that when a person

really wanted an education, they must have it. And my good sister here has said that if I could persuade your aunt to let you go away to school this winter, she would be glad to have you stay with her. And Aunty, here, will be your mother."

"Whoo-oop!" yelled Rob, who had become very fond of his intelligent little friend, and turned three somersaults in quick succession. Elizabeth clapped her hands and Caroline shrieked her delight. The twins, not fully understanding what it was all about, danced around, yelling like wild Indians. Anne certainly could not feel any doubt of the warmth of her welcome from the children, but her joy was so great that she could only stand and look from one to another, too dazed at first to speak.

When the childish racket had subsided a little, she gasped, "Do-do you mean that I-I am going to you' house to-to stay all winteh with you-all?"

Uncle smiled. "Yes; that is, to Mrs. Marsden's home. Aunt Alice has agreed to look after you, and Mamma says there is plenty of room for you."

"Aren't you going to be there?" said the

child; for Uncle had won her love, just as surely as he always won a child's love.

"Will you come and be my little daughter for a winter?" said Aunty, putting an arm around the child; and, drawing her close to her, she kissed the white forehead.

The kind words and the loving arm about her, and the warm kiss, following Uncle's offer of what seemed almost Heaven to the lonely little girl, were more than she could stand with composure. Throwing herself down upon the ground, she buried her head in Aunty's lap, where she sobbed violently. No one disturbed her for a while; then Aunty, growing alarmed, tried to raise her to her feet, saying, "My dear, you must not cry so! You are wearing yourself out." But the sobs did not cease. Her feelings were so intense that time was needed.

Then Uncle said, "Come, Anne, brace up now. Be a little woman."

With a great effort, as if she would do anything he asked, Anne subdued her sobs enough to say, almost in a whisper, "No one's eveh kissed me—not since my motheh died, five yea's ago."

"Come on, Buff," cried Rob, with unusual

tact; "let's us go over in the Black Forest like we started to do," and, catching a twin by each hand, he raced away, the two sisters following.

The young birds were all out of their nests now, except an occasional brood here or there, that, for some unaccountable reason, the parents had been belated in raising; or that happened to be a second or third brood of the season. Missing their pleasure of watching the home-life of the birds, the children had spent most of their time for the past two or three weeks in searching for nests, and Rob was sure that in the cool depths of the Black Forest they might yet find a few more nests containing young birds.

The older children had been for some time allowed to roam about the outskirts of the Black Forest, and the little ones were permitted to accompany them on condition that they remained close by.

They found the woods very dry, and anything but cool. Leaves crackled under their feet as they trudged about. At the expense of their clothing, and many scratches and bruises, they penetrated farther into the forest than they had ever before gone alone.

It seemed strangely hot and still. Hardly a bird was to be seen. No wee animals scuttled about among the leaves. No squirrels played in the trees. Where were all their little woods-friends? They began to feel an unaccountable awe of the silent woods. Had everything gone to sleep, as in the fairy-tale? The twins clung to the older ones in silent fear. The leaves underfoot almost burned their feet. The trunks of the trees were hot, as they laid their hands upon them.

"Let's go home," begged Caroline at last. "I'm so hot and tired."

"Oh, no," urged Rob. "Let's find one more nest."

So they pushed on a little farther, and, at last, Rob triumphantly pointed out a dove's nest in the crotch of a tree. It was so loosely put together that it seemed as if, at any moment, the babies might fall through. Rob scrambled up the tree to get a look at the young birds, then dropped down, quite willing now to turn back.

"I never was so hot," he complained, as he mopped his crimson forehead with his handkerchief. "Let's get a drink somewhere."

"We'd have to go clear through the woods to

the river," said Elizabeth, with an involuntary shudder at the thought, "and I want to get home. Let's go on."

"Yes, yes," cried the little ones. So they stumbled on toward camp, reaching it at last with the twins almost exhausted, and the older ones hot and nervous. When they had refreshed themselves, they found Papa, just returned from a fishing trip, talking earnestly to Uncle and Mamma.

"The farmers are much excited over the forest-fires farther up," he was saying. "They want us to be very careful with our fires and matches. You little ones," he continued, turning to the children, "must not throw down any matches, or light any bonfires. In fact," he said, turning to the older folks again, "I think that the farmers would be quite as well pleased if we were out of the woods. And I've been thinking, Mamma, as we were expecting to go home in a week, perhaps it would be just as well to pack up our traps and go next Friday." A wail went up from the children, but the grown folks, after a short consultation, decided that Papa's plan was best.

Tuesday morning the sun rose in a red haze, and Tuesday night it set like a great red orange in the western sky. Wednesday, at noon, it hung like a dull red ball overhead, and the air was full of smoke. The woods about their camp now seemed alive with birds and tiny four-footed creatures.

"Where did they all come from, all of a sudden?" the children wondered. But the grown folks were too busy and too anxious for once to answer their questions. And they could not guess that the forest-fires were raging behind them, and driving the terrified little creatures on before.

Thursday morning the children were awakened by the tramping of many feet, and the rumbling of wagons, and tramping of horses, as men passed through their camp. Papa and Uncle were up and dressed, and about to join a party of men, when the children awakened.

"You must all wait for some coffee," they heard Mamma say, as they scrambled into their clothes any which way, and splashed cold water into their sleepy eyes.

"Is there any danger here?" she asked

anxiously of the men standing about waiting for the coffee to boil.

"Oh, no," answered a big man, who seemed to be the leader. "It can't cross the corn-field or the river."

"Oh," cried Rob, "is the fire in the Black Forest?"

"They're all afire, sonny," the man answered. "We're going up now to try to save some of the timber, and Farmer McLeod's farm over yon to the east."

Marshall, who had joined them, sleepily rubbing his eyes, looked eagerly at his mother, his now shining eyes plainly asking the question his lips did not form. But she went quietly on pouring the coffee.

Turning to his father, Rob pulled his coat-tails, saying in a loud whisper, "Oh, may I go, Daddy? May Marsh and I go? Oh, please. I know we could help."

His father hesitated, but the big farmer looked at the well-grown lad approvingly. "Sure you can go, sonny. We need every man in the neighborhood," and he winked mischievously at Papa.

"All right," said Papa, "come along.

Marsh, you ride over, and you'd better just look on. It's pretty hot," he added, lest the boy feel hurt.

Having drained their coffee-cups, the men hurried away, while the twins shouted shrilly to know if they might go, too.

In the corn-field the little party of men walking, met many little woods-creatures driven from their lairs by the fire, and made unusually tame by their terror of that dreaded enemy. A fox stole softly past them, and glimpses of rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, porcupines, and wee mice might be seen on every side, as they fled from the common enemy.

On the edge of the forest they met a young doe, her great soft eyes wild with fear. For a moment she faced them, then, like a flash, disappeared in the smoke-clad trees of the forest.

The smoke grew thick and blinding when they entered the woods. A quarter of a mile inside the men found themselves among the blazing trees. Not all the trees were burning, even here. Many only showed a little blaze near the top. But the roar of the great fire could be distinctly heard. Soon they could see it beyond them, raging in the height of its fury.

Like some strange roaring animal, it leaped from tree to tree. On the men rushed, half-blinded, but determined to take the shortest way to the farmer's place, for they realized more than ever, when they saw the fire, how much their strength was needed.

Near the opposite side of the forest, for they had cut across one corner, they came upon the dead body of a lynx, a plover still grasped firmly in his stiffened jaws, and several bullets in his body.

"Ah," cried Uncle, "this is undoubtedly the creature I shot at that night we were over here. I am sorry that we did not find him soon enough to have saved his skin."

When they reached the farm they found a number of the nearer neighbors ahead of them, all busy, or eager to help in the fight before them. Some were cutting down the magnificent forest-trees. Others were chopping them up and hauling them to places of safety. Others, still, were digging deep trenches between the farm and the forest. And some were on top of the houses, granaries, and other buildings, soaking them with water to prevent them from

catching fire from the flying sparks. These latter men Rob joined.

Birds of all kinds flew about the heads of the men as they worked, almost tame in their terror. Once a beautiful deer bounded across a field in full view of the men.

One man caught up his gun and was about to shoot, but another struck down his hand, saying, "Aw, don't! Let it go!" And the other men echoed his words, "Let it go," as the creature disappeared in the woods beyond. A wild-cat crept slyly away through a corn-field; and grouse, plover, and quail were everywhere. Snakes wriggled through the grass, escaping from one enemy, only to be killed by another.

Rob thought of the little mother-dove on her nest in the forest, and his heart ached for her. There had been no burning trees within a quarter of a mile of her when they came through the forest. The wind was blowing away from the tree, and a tiny stream ran between it and the fire. But even under these circumstances it was hard to say how far the fire might have traveled by this time. The boy worked steadily on, however, but wishing more and more, as he

saw the birds and animals flying from the danger, that he could help the poor little mother-dove.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the men stopped working, for the fire was halted in its mad rush, and by their labors the farm was saved. The women were urging the men to eat a luncheon, which they had prepared, and Rob, impatient to go, was forced to wait until they were rested and refreshed.

At last, however, with the farmer's grateful thanks following them, they hurried toward their homes. This time those who walked, instead of pushing through the forest skirted it. When they came around to the south side, the camp only across the field from them, Rob paused. He felt sure that those great burly men would laugh at him if he told them that he wanted to go to the relief of a little mourning-dove. But there was one of the party, who, he knew, would sympathize with him. So, drawing his uncle to one side, he told him of the nest in the woods.

"The wind wasn't blowing toward her tree until noon, Uncle. But I'm afraid by this time the fire must be very near to her," he explained.

Uncle was very hot and tired, and so were all of the men. But his heart throbbed with pity for the bird, who, he knew, would stay with her young through almost any danger.

"Men," he said at last, "you've seen the little creatures of the woods all day escaping from the fire. But Rob here tells me that, just a little way from here, is a mourning-dove's nest with young in it. We feel sure that she will not leave her young to perish alone. And having seen so many little creatures escaping to-day, Rob cannot bear to leave her sitting there alone, awaiting such a horrid death."

"Oh, she won't stay," argued one of the men.

Uncle looked doubtful. "I have studied birds for a number of years," he said, "and I have never seen a dove desert her young for any cause. Rob and I propose to go over there, cut down the tree, and, if possible, save her."

The men looked at one another, hesitating. Saving the timber was one thing; saving a foolish little mourning-dove was quite another. Uncle reached for the ax in the hands of one of the men.

The man did not give it to him, but said, half sheepishly, "I guess I'll go along." He was

the young fellow who had brought the dead birds to Uncle for sale.

In a moment the whole party turned back into the smoke and heat once more. The underbrush was burning in places, and the tops of many trees were blazing. They soon reached a place from where they could see the nest still unharmed, but the tree was burning near the top.

At first the smoke hid the mother-bird; then, a gust of wind clearing it away for a moment, they saw her standing upon the nest, her wings spread wide above the little ones, as she had so often stood to protect them from the sun. They could hear her wild cries of terror, and now and then she would lower her head to the little ones, and make soft, cooing noises, as if assuring them that mother was near. The light of the flames flickered upon her exquisite plumage, changing it to shimmering golden green and then to purple, then softening to bluish gray, with just a tint of rose.

Some underbrush was burning fiercely about the tree, so that it was plainly impracticable to cut it down. Rob dashed wildly about, trying to find a place through which he could approach

it. The undergrowth was not thick, and the farmers, seeing the boy's real distress, began cutting and tramping out a path for him.

"We can't stay here long enough to cut down the tree," said one of the men hoarsely, wiping his smarting eyes. The smoke was growing thicker every moment.

"No, no, Rob," cried his uncle. "It is foolish to try. We cannot ask so much of the men."

But Rob, not even hearing his uncle's words, had clasped the hot trunk of the tree with his arms and knees, and, blinded by smoke and smarting tears, was rapidly clambering up toward the nest.

"Hurrah!" shouted the men, always delighted with pluck of any kind.

But Papa and Uncle held their breath in fear. Twice the boy's hands, soon blistered by the hot, rough bark, refused their hold, and he slipped back. But never hesitating, he at last reached the first branches, where, sitting astride of a limb, and rubbing his eyes on a grimy shirt-sleeve, he looked about for the nest.

In despair the little mother had settled down to await her fate, her little ones nestling against the beautiful breast that now, as ever, protected

them. She did not offer to fly when he put his hand upon her, but looked at him with such agonized pleading in her eyes that the boy never forgot it. Wresting nest, babies, and mother from the branch he thrust them inside his shirt, where he could feel her wee heart beating frantically against his. Buttoning his coat firmly over them, he slid rapidly down the tree.

When he reached the ground, the men, to the boy's amazement, took off their hats and cheered for him; and, taking his blistered hand in their rough, calloused ones, they shook it heartily, calling him a "plucky little beggar," and other such complimentary names.

But Papa and Uncle walked silently home, their hearts throbbing with pride and thankfulness that they were giving to our country a man such as she needs.

Rob, quite unconscious of any heroism on his part, but only conscious of the marvelous self-sacrifice of the little mother-dove, rushed breathlessly into camp.

"Here, Marsh," he cried, as he rushed to Marshall's hammock, Marshall having ridden home ahead of the others. "Here's something for you to take care of. A whole family."



SHE DID NOT OFFER TO FLY WHEN HE PUT HIS HAND UPON HER. — *Page 348.*

The children, as usual, crowded about to hear the story, and admire the beautiful bird. Rob's blistered hands were tenderly bandaged, and that night, in his first happy dreams, he was dimly conscious of soft kisses pressed upon his sore fingers, and drowsily wondered to hear Mamma's voice, distinctly trembling, say, "God bless my brave boy!"

And Papa's answering, "God bless him!"

CHAPTER XXIV

PRIZES

"Plume and go ye summer folk,
Fly from winter's killing stroke,
Blue bird, Sparrow, Thrush and Swallow,
Wild geese from the marshes follow,
Wood-dove from the lonesome hollow,
Rise and follow south,—all follow."

EDITH M. THOMAS.

A FEW days later the Marsden children were gathered again in the big living-room at home, where we first met them. This time there were no cloudy faces, and no empty chairs.

Marshall, with shining eyes, and cheeks to which the glow of health had returned to stay, was with them. Though not yet strong, all symptoms of the dreaded disease were gone, dissolved in the fresh air and sunshine. He sat in a big easy-chair, now and then turning the pages of a little leather-bound note-book he held in his hand. Rob and Elizabeth each were looking over a book like it, and jealously shielding the pages from curious eyes, as if some weighty

secret might be hidden between the covers. The twins lay upon the floor beside old Dane, each poring over a brightly illustrated "bird-book," the reward for finding the kingfisher's nest. Caroline wandered restlessly back and forth from chair to window.

It was almost tea-time, and while they sat, evidently awaiting some one or some thing, Mamma and Aunty entered the room.

With them came Anne, also carrying a note-book. But could that be the Anne we met in the woods? The unhappy look was gone from her eyes; instead, they overflowed with a radiance of love and gratitude. Her cheeks glowed with the roses of health and happiness, and dimples played about her lips.

The children flew to give them chairs, and as they seated themselves, Elizabeth sighed, "Will they never come? They are *so* late."

As she spoke, from James's sturdy lungs came the glad cry, "The car's stopped! The car's stopped! They're getting off! Yes, here they come!" And, to emphasize his words, he somersaulted back to his place on the rug.

A few moments later Uncle entered the room, followed by Papa.

"What a gay party!" said Uncle, beaming upon them, and deliberately seating himself, as if all unconscious of the meaning of this little gathering. The twins quickly mounted to his knees, and Caroline found a place on the arm of his chair.

"What means all these literary-looking note-books?" he teased.

"Now, Uncle," laughed Elizabeth impatiently, "you know that you told us to be ready with our reports to-night."

"Why, sure enough, I did," said Uncle. "And wasn't there something said about a prize for the best answer?"

"You know there was," answered Elizabeth, laughing, and gently tweaking a lock of his hair. "And you know you've got it somewhere, too. So there!"

"Very well, then," grumbled Uncle, bound to tease. "Perhaps I can find an old handkerchief or something that will do for a prize. Come then, let's have your reports. Ladies first, you know!"

Elizabeth rose confidently. "I think I saw about seventy kinds of birds," she said. "And, from what Uncle said, and from the books I

read, I think there must be about a hundred kinds of birds to be seen in Wisconsin."

"Good!" said Uncle, patting her head. "Your turn now, Anne."

Anne rose shyly. "I wasn't the'e when the othehs stahted thei' books," she said, in her low southern voice, "but I saw oveh fo'ty kinds of bi'ds in this State, or hea'd them. And I read of about seventy-five moah. And, from what you' Uncle told us," nodding toward him, "I think the'e must be about one hundred and twenty-five kinds of bi'ds in Wisconsin."

"Our numbers are increasing," laughed Uncle. "Will you please report, Rob?"

"Well," stammered Rob, blushing deeply, "I 'most always forgot to take my note-book along when we went tramping. And some of the birds' names were so hard to spell that when I came to look them over, I couldn't tell what they were meant for." Here he was interrupted by shouts of laughter, for Rob's spelling was something remarkable.

Looking about in surprise, he continued. "But I have the names of about fifty birds, and I think I saw about twenty-five that I didn't put down,—"

"Oh, ho!" laughed Elizabeth, "you're not in the race at all!" And Rob sat down, covered with confusion.

"And now, Marshall," said Uncle.

"It wouldn't be fair for me to take a prize, Uncle," said Marshall, brightly smiling. "For I have had so much more time to read than the others, and in one of the books I found the names of two hundred birds that have been seen in this State. As far as seeing the birds myself goes, I have only seen about fifty kinds."

"Then," said Uncle, "it seems to me that Anne's answer is the nearest correct, but Elizabeth has seen the greatest number of varieties of birds. Thinking that something like this might arise, I provided two prizes." And rising, he went out into the hall, the little folks looking eagerly after him.

He returned almost immediately, with two rather bulky-looking packages exactly alike, which he placed in the hands of the two girls, saying as he did so, "I hope you will make good use of these, my girls, and that they may help to bring you health and wisdom. And I hope, too, that kodak snap-shots will be the only

kind of shots you will ever take at your little bird-brothers.''

''Kodaks!'' cried both girls in one breath, and Elizabeth fairly threw herself upon her uncle, smothering him with her thanks. But Anne's words of thanks were few and timid, and her eyes expressed her feelings far better than her tongue. The others crowded eagerly about to examine and admire the prizes.

''Oh, hasn't it been the most *gorgeous* summer?'' breathed Elizabeth in a half-whisper, when quiet had been restored once more.

''*You* don't half know,'' whispered Anne.

''Well,'' said Marshall, ''after all, Uncle gave me the best prize of all''; and he looked at his uncle with eyes that shone with emotion, as he tried to express the love and gratitude he felt so deeply. ''He gave me health!''

''I think,'' said Anne, blushing deeply, ''that I am getting several prizes. And from all of you. You all are giving me so much mo'e than I deserve. But I'll try to do my best to lea'n, so you won't feel shame fo' me.'' And her eyes fell as she tried to look her gratitude to one and another.

"But Uncle gave Papa and me the very best," said Mamma, taking Marshall's hand in hers and laying it against her cheek, "for he gave us our healthy boy back again."

"You-all's tea's ben sahved dis long while," exclaimed 'Merica's voice at the door. "It's 'mos' spiled aready."

And Uncle, stopping Mamma's words with a kiss, encircled her plump waist with his arm, and waltzed with her out to the dining-room, where we will leave them, all enjoying the good things with appetites sharpened by the sunshine and fresh air of tramping and camping.

THE END

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